**Beirut Institute e-Policy Circle 36**

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**Unofficial transcript**

**Raghida Dergham:** Good morning New York City where Celine Semaan is and where my wonderful town, that I miss, my wonderful town of Manhattan. Hello Celine welcome and good afternoon to London where Thalia, my daughter Thalia Dergham is coming to us from hello Thalia and good late afternoon to Nada Debs and to Bernard Khoury they are both in Beirut and this is the 36th e-Policy Circle of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi. Welcome. This is a part of what Beirut Institute Summit does. All of you apart from Bernard Khoury have been to the Summit edition III in Abu Dhabi and you saw that we try to not only do geopolitics but we try to get to know what people in the arts, in technology, the creative fields in architecture, what are they thinking, what's tomorrow like for them. We like to include a lot of young people. So Bernard you should be on the fourth edition, hopefully we will have it in March 2022 COVID permitting these days. It may be changing because of the situation. So welcome to this very special session. I'll start with full disclosure that the Skyline tower, the building that Bernard Khoury will be mentioning is a place that I call home. So I wanna make sure that whenever I speak about the towers or make a comment you know that I'm telling you that I have something in it for me. Also I want to say that Thalia is not only my daughter she's also the co-founder of Beirut Institute this is the first time that I host my daughter in a professional way so let's just see how that goes it's gonna be wonderful. The last thing I will have to say is that this is not my domain. What I'm probably good at is geopolitics but in this case you are all the masters. I'm sure you will capture the imagination of all the people who are joining us virtually to learn not only about what happened in the last year or so and what happened in your own domain but how do you go forward form here. With this I will give 4 minutes to each of you then we will engage in a conversation and let it be free wherever we go. We start with 4 minutes to you Bernard Khoury please.

**Bernard Khoury:** Hello Nada, Celine, Thalia of course Raghida. But I don't think I'm here only because Raghida lives in a building I've designed. I remember meeting Raghida the first time probably more than 10 years ago at market at cityscape in Dubai and she was moderating a debate that I was part of and I think there was also Rem Koolhaas on that table and that was a very interesting conversation we've had. I was quite on the attack that day with Koolhaas that used to be my teacher back then my professor at [inaudible]. But yes I've seen a lot of Raghida lately because she's been very involved in a project that I've been also very involved in for the last few months. She's living in a building that I designed about 10 years ago facing the port of Beirut and a building that was the victim on the frontline facing the port. So Raghida was very involved not only because she lives in that building but also because she's aware of the importance of the architectural expression that the rehabilitation of this project will take as we live in a country unfortunately where the state institutions are very absent to say the least when it comes to registering our history on our own territory, formulating any sort of consensual history over our territory. This has been very visible in particular to that building. It was pretty much on all the TV screens worldwide after the explosion of the Beirut Port. We thought that it was very important, that the rehabilitation was very important, but that not only be a neutral rehabilitation but a meaningful rehabilitation, one that celebrates its recovery in a meaningful and relevant way. So I guess this is one of the reasons why Raghida has me with you today and probably because she is well aware that I am not an architect who aims at designing pretty things and beautiful things but she knows that I'm also very keen about the political meaning of my practice particularly on this territory. Particularly in Beirut in this part of the world where I think architecture is very much a political act, I think any creative field is. We are I think the true résistants and this is where real true politics happens, and not in the conventional realm of politics like it would be in the West. Our institutions are hijacked and we simply have to find other ways to practice politics. And build meaning. So this is probably where I will be intervening and this is probably why Raghida has me with you on this panel.

**R Dergham:** Of course not for that only because you are Bernard Khoury a renowned architect worldwide and we are very proud of you and because of exactly what you said, your work is not about beautifying, it's about actually making a statement a political act in a very fundamental meaning so for that thank you for joining us. We're going to discuss the explosion itself and where do we go from here but for now I will go to Nada Debs for her 4 minutes. Nada Debs please.

**Nada Debs:** Hello. So I am a furniture designer and I work mainly with craftsmen of this region. And I grew up in Japan so for me identity was a very important issue. So my work is all about finding identity in design. The blast was something that really shook me in a way where it either was going to make me go forward and embrace what we have or the reverse. And I was really surprised that my own reaction, our studio is really just behind the Skyline it's not very far. And it was completely destroyed. About 60% of our furniture was destroyed, all our windows, doors, like everybody in the area and for us it was an immediate reaction to fix the studio to get back on our feet in order not to leave the craftsmen because I heard of a lot of people ready to leave and for me it was so important that we don't abandon the people who are creating the identity of who we are. So for me it was a very important aspect. But at the same time we had to actually find work. So how do we find work? And that is where I started to consider traveling and bringing work to Lebanon. So I spent some time in Dubai and the idea is to start bringing work to the craftsmen to actually focus a lot more on craft and what I was quite surprised that people in the UAE were not very familiar with craft. So I thought that today we have a very great opportunity to show this very important part of our identity and heritage and share it with really the Middle East and help people value it. And what's also very important as well is also to translate it into a luxury product because we are not, we don't really see ourselves as luxury in our items and it is really the craft was always made in tourist shops. So here when you raise this awareness I mean that's the only reason I'm to bring it into luxury because this way you can bring out the awareness and bringing the value of craft and giving it just value. So this is where I am today. I'm working a lot on a mapping exercise in Tripoli in the north of Lebanon so that when we do bring work to this country we have a diverse amount of people that we can work with, not just my own craftsmen.

**R Dergham:** Thank you so much Nada Debs we will be speaking about what you're doing in Tripoli because it's really important for me not only that you marry East and East but that also you've reached out throughout the country looking for craftspeople. I also want to touch upon what you have been doing recently for the headquarters of the League of Arab States. That will be later in the discussion. I will go now to Celine Semaan. Normally Celine and I hang out in New York but now she is in New York and has done some things for Lebanon as well. Let me have your 4 minutes as your opening statement about anything you want to say. Later on we will engage in a conversation related to the Blast. But I'll give you four minutes just to say whatever you want. Celine it's all yours.

**Celine Semaan Vernon:** Thank you so much Raghida. Thank you Thalia, Nada and Bernard it's such an honor to be in your company. My name is Celine Semaan as Raghida said. I am based in New York City. I work at the intersection of climate justice and human rights. And the 2 together this intersection is a big field of study but is an important one as you will see and as we will touch upon it later as Raghida said with the Beirut Blast, the impact of that blast on the environment as well as on human rights was very significant and the work that we do at the Slow Factory Foundation really brings this intersection to the forefront to the public, to the industries to understand their impact both on a human level and on an environmental level. So when they are discussing things around sustainability when brands or organizations want to engage in sustainability they're able to do so in a holistic way. So we try to separate it with good for the earth and good for the people is the best way we're able to simplify it and make it accessible because topics around sustainability or climate justice are very complex and oftentimes brands don't know where to begin. What should we do? Should we go carbon neutral? Should we use only organic? Should we like invest in artisanship and craftsmanship? And the answer often is all of the above and/or. Sustainability is a spectrum. It's not just one or the other. It is all of the above. And with Slow Factory we help brands, organizations, even governments understand how they can approach these topics because we are as the UN claim in the decade of action since 2020 where climate justice is becoming one of the most important factors of our time. The Middle East is one of the red zones that the UN stated the first zones the front line communities that are going to be hit by climate change. One more degree higher and the entire UAE is unlivable. So this is a real issue, a tangible issue a human rights issue and this is where the Slow Factory operates. How do we do so? We do so with three ways. One is through education and open education. It's a public-facing education that we target basically cater to the general public. We choose less complex information so that the general public can understand and take action. We also do the same in the private sector. We work closely with brands and conduct private open education sessions so that they can catch up to the information and understand better ways to be able to affect their businesses. And essentially still be in business in the next 5 years because that's what they're going to be talking about. And the second one and last one perhaps my 4 minutes are over is the investment of new materials. New materials are very impactful in bridging the gap between human rights and climate justice. Just with the change of a material we can already lower the carbon and invest in lab-grown material as well as waste-to-resource and the Slow Factory invests heavily into these material sciences as well as bringing them to the market. Maybe my 4 minutes are over.

**R Dergham:** That's ok you'll have the chance to elaborate much more. But do you wanna say quickly what was the third point?

**Semaan:** Education, material and system design because it's a holistic practice so it's a little bit what I would say I'm a little bit an architect but of systems not of physical buildings. We work on system design, restructuring the supply chain for example, restructuring the internal system that brands and organizations can have a long-term plan that's sustainable. Thank you Raghida.

**R Dergham:** Fascinating. Thank you very much Celine we'll get into a deeper discussion of all these important topics you said. Thalis Dergham 4 minutes to you.

**Thalia Dergham:** Thank you for having me, so interesting to hear what the others have said. I'm going to touch briefly upon a mix of some of the subjects that have been brought up so far. [inaudible] More specifically in the department of fashion and luxury fashion. So as we know obviously fashion has always been about an expression of identity, political or otherwise, really about achieving a sense of community or belonging and finding people with whom you want to associate and affiliate through items that you identify with. I think what happened this year is that the world really changed dramatically and that it affected the fashion industry whereby businesses really had to embrace not only being an industry that provides luxury fashion goods but really being a platform for good for their communities. And what they realized is that essentially now it's officially cool to care. And in order to create that aspiration luxury relies on they had to really embed their internal culture with the values that they saw were happening within the dialogue of cultures around them. So what we've always known is that powerful design in fashion or other fields as Bernard mentions often comes as a political act often related to a specific cause or designed for political entities to make a change or to [inaudible]. But what we're seeing now as Celine has actually mentioned is this sort of more holistic and increasingly intersectional and progressive value system that is embedding itself in fashion and in the culture industries whereby people are demanding that these industries reshift and redesign their systems to shape a new status quo that shapes the future of behaviors. I think sustainability is a really good example of that because we know that sustainability for many years was very niche it was considered pretty much an activist, almost a granola way to be, and those values weren't necessarily mainstream but there was a distinct shift in the past few years that really convinced people to take on sustainability as something that they were to demand of diverse industries and more specifically the fashion industry. And for me I think it's interesting to consider what was the catalyst for that change. And I think it's really about that accessibility that Celine was speaking about. About creating this holistic multitude of ways in which you can begin to change your behavior as an individual, to help shift the way these industries function. And I think really a good example of that is considering sustainable fashion that was considered to be limiting your choices. People perceived that more rules more regulations and more things to consider was boring all around. But actually what we've seen through innovation and the systems design and more of a dialogue around sustainability is actually not limiting creativity and individual expression. Innovation actually enables far more expansive choice and creative expression than without it. So if you think about when you're required to be more resourceful that's often when you're most creative and new design ideas come through. If you think from a practical measure the category of pre-owned fashion really widens the amount of items that you can access to and search for from just this decade and new things that are produced, decades and decades of clothes and fashion that represented different political ideals and values that you can associate with. Thinking about repurposing deadstock material to create truly one of a kind unique items that cannot be replicated you would certainly not see someone walking down the street wearing the same thing. Those values have become very appealing in fashion for a more personal sense and have been a catalyst to demand that these industries actually redesign themselves and set examples for the future generations who will certainly only consider fashion brands in this way.

**R Dergham:** Thank you very much Thalia. I want to have the common denominator discussed amongst you. The common denominator is that Blast. The Beirut port Blast. Because every one of you has been related to this in one way or another. Let me see first of all with what Bernard Khoury calls not rebuilding, we resist the word rebuilding of what has been devastated but rehabilitating. You use the word stitching, operating you use the word healing. Can you explain what are you talking about Bernard Khoury?

**Khoury:** I resist the word rebuilding because rebuilding implies in ways that once there was something, and then an accident happened, and then we're cured, so we rebuild as if nothing has happened. Rebuilding doesn't necessarily take into the process what happens specifically at a very specific moment in time the reaction you have to that accident which will certainly give another shape or inform in many ways whatever project you're addressing. It is something with the August 4th blast. This is an issue I've been dealing since 30 years. My first encounter with Beirut as an architect back in 1991 with a project that was called evolving scars at the time. I was very young I was 22-23 years old at the time and to me it was very important to look at Beirut not as a reconstruction project, not as a tabula rasa not as a project that we try to portray Beirut in dangerously simplistic way but that we try to look at Beirut in a very honest way and celebrate it in a meaningful way and building meaning very specifically from our recent past and not necessarily bypass certain things that seem problematic for certain people. I have a problem with simplistic histories I think they're very dangerous and I think that's what kept me in Beirut over the last 30 years. This is why I think that Beirut is an extremely interesting environment because you're always on the forefront of some sort of battle. And I don't mean battle in a negative way. I mean it in a very positive way. You're always facing situations that sometimes shake very fundamental issues or values that other contexts take for granted. So I am still in Beirut my base is still Beirut and probably after August 4th more so than ever. I am very happy to hear that Nada is still here. That all of you are still very concerned about this place because we need all of you. We need Nada to bring people to work, to people in Tripoli, I think it's a great form of resistance to build alliances. This is something that I think is incredibly important and also to rebuild an economy on very solid means, with reconnecting with these people that you know over the last 30 years have we have lost a good part of our industries. The production of craftsmen, agriculture and many other productive sectors have been kind of left in favor of service sectors such as banking, tourism and I don't think this was necessarily a very good thing.

**R Dergham:** You know Bernard people ask me what are you doing, you have the option to be in New York. And I tell you I was fascinated by the people here who live in the belly of instability as I like to say. And then I got addicted to living here you know in an unpredictable environment and yet there is something charming about it. And the anger [inaudible] that is provoked by politics and politicians that is made up for by artists like yourself and your resilience although I don't like the word resilience very much I like the word rehabilitation much more and I think you know maybe when I go to Nada, Celine and Thalia maybe at the end after this particular section on the blast maybe you wouldn't mind sharing showing us what it did to the Skyline, what happened. What was the building looking what did it look like after the devastation and what are you trying to do with it if you don't mind to share that with us while I go to Nada or would you like now Bernard

**Debs:** So you want me to say what I thought about the Skyline?

**R Dergham:** Not at all I want you to tell me why didn't you leave like Bernard was saying? A lot of people left and you are one of our best designers internationally and definitely in the Arab region and definitely as we said you marry East and East and therefore you didn't really need to be here only. You mentioned some of the reasons. But can you explain to me what did the bBast basically there has been a lot of violations of our human rights as Lebanese in this country by the lack of accountability, by the lack of even we're taken for granted by these insurance companies the local ones such as the one of Skyline Al Mashreq or the reinsurers such as Swissre who have just dropped the ball on us and have said we'll wait for an investigation and then we'll see what we pay. So between dollars and so-called lollars and the refusal to commit there is a humiliating lack of respect for what we have gone through. Yet you didn't pack up and said goodbye. You went all the way to Tripoli to see how can you help in that way. Tell us about that.

**Debs:** Well I mean to me it's not ok the country was already falling apart before the blast and so I was already questioning plan B because everyone was talking about plan Bs already at that time. For me I even thought what if I relocate. So I did put myself in another situation that I feel like today. My work is actually based on Beirut. It's based on the people here and there's no way I can just abandon them and leave. It's not just for me but it's a collaboration. They are who inspire me. So for me if I go to wherever Dubai you know I'm not going to be able to do what I do here. I visited factories no one can do what we do here. We have

**Khoury:** Nada you are international even though you're based here and I think there's no such a thing as an international designer who doesn't have a thing specific related to the territory. So you don't need to be in New York or in Paris or in Berlin or in Tokyo to be international. You're far more international by being in Beirut

**Debs:** I mean that was really my mission when I first came twenty years ago you know people were only importing and there was hardly any export especially of furniture design and product design. They didn't even teach it at university when I first came. So we've really come a long way and I feel like I'm part of this evolution and to me I also felt very responsible so for me it was a no-brainer for me to be here and to continue. And I found that there was much more energy today for people to work together it's not competition it's much more of a friendly collaboration even among other designers so there's this support system and a very strong network that's being created. And this I don't think can replace. So for me it's very important yes.

**R Dergham:** Celine Semaan you went ahead and you created had before created something called Superfund which is a global fundraiser by slow factory foundation. After the Beirut explosion you went ahead and you collected funds to provide urgent relief to the creative community in Lebanon. Tell me about that.

**Semaan:** Yes of course. So the superfund for Beirut took place right after the explosion. But before the explosion we were already working on the superfund and it's a play on the term for the US federal superfund which is basically a big fundraiser to clean toxic sites. So we wanted to reuse the term to just bring it to the attention of the public it needs to be funds allocated to clean toxic sites whether they are toxic because of environmental injustices or toxic because of human rights injustices or both as you know we work at this intersection. We were already working on the superfund but immediately after the explosion we switched gears and we were like let's start with Beirut let's do a superfund for Beirut and at first the fund was general and open and we were scouting projects and trying our best to be of service and very soon after we received a call from Rony Helou who is a fashion designer in Lebanon who had put together a group of designers that studios were affected and asked us could you please fundraise with us on our behalf so that we can keep our businesses alive because if our businesses are not working to the point of Nada how can the ecosystem around our business survive. [...] So basically the superfund for Beirut began after the explosion and with the support of Rony Helou and his group and soon after we opened up another fund to support elia lenia, migrant workers who were affected by the blast. Of course we're a small company and we never really did this before so of course we received criticism that we are starting with designers, why are we starting with small businesses we should be doing immediate humanitarian rescue basically, humanitarian response but there were so many other groups doing humanitarian response and that have those connections. We wanted to leave the humanitarian response and the ones who were capturing the millions and millions of dollars in funding do what they do best because that was not what we were built to do. What we were built to do was ok we are primarily working in the fashion industry in the product industry let's work where we know and that's how we started with this fundraiser and the way we did it also we you know basically raised about a hundred thousand dollars on our own but the fund itself raised about 300,000 USD with our partners the Slow Factory was able to contribute 100,000. That is still small amount and we worked so hard. It is again the work that I think is most efficient was to really bring to the forefront the idea that Beirut is a manufacturing hub, it is a designer hub, it is a place where businesses exist and continue to exist and what we were also very proud of was that we had vogue international put an entire story, blast and focus on Lebanese designers.

**R Dergham:** Excellent, Thalia I don't want to dwell too much on the Blast because I wanna move on to other topics. [inaudible] When a city like Beirut is dealt such a blow and such a blast to be exact what occurs to people like you? I definitely wanna keep talking about what happened to Beirut because I think if we let it just disappear the subject disappear I think we would be doing an injustice to Beirut. I tell you Thalia you were born in New York, your only connection to Lebanon is me but you know your generation what do you wanna say? what did you feel? How did others, how did they react to this blast and especially that it's also your home as well? And we'll go back to Bernard Khoury.

**T Dergham:** I think it's very interesting because Beirut has this reputation amongst I guess people our age and internationally it's been this incredibly beautiful mysterious generous seductive place that everyone sort of always says I'd love to visit Beirut and so the reaction I think to something happening in Beirut for me from an observational perspective was very different to the way people react when they hear about other sort of horrific events in the Middle East be them blast or war. So I was really an interesting thing to follow because the reaction of people in London or New York was really distinct in that there was a real genuine concern for the well-being of creative communities as Celine mentioned but also just the society as a whole because they had heard that it was so wonderful. So rich and so incredible so to that extent I feel that people were really reaching out in ways probably might not have done had it not be for a personal connection with the city either by a very good friend or someone they admired or they respect being Lebanese of course because we have this huge diaspora all doing amazing things in cities like London and New York. An example of that is a pro skateboarded that lives around the block from me and he actually has a huge following of skateboarding fans and he associated with a very famous skateboarding fashion brand. And he came to me and said I'd like to do a sale of some of my merchandise which gave a lot of money for people who are big fans. So what charity should I give them to so I search and he just set up his own sale, posted it on social media the fandom around his work he raised a huge amount of money just off some personal [inaudible] and spread the word among a community of skateboarders that probably would have never taken the chance to really explore what happened there, why is this cool skateboard dude donating all of his merchandise to this cause. A younger generation would then grow up knowing that and really embracing knowing about Beirut and how they can help. So I think it was quite unique in that way that would have happened to a lot of other cities and this is something that I found very touching and interesting.

**R Dergham:** Bernard Khoury can you see your unorthodox approach to rehabilitating a building and this is the last time we're going to mention Skyline. Can we see the Skyline and your approach to as you admit it's unorthodox of redoing of rehabilitating the Skyline. Can you tell us what we're looking at?

**Khoury:** We're sharing screens one second.

**R Dergham:** If you have a picture of what was the before and after.

**Khoury:**  That's the before after no.

**R Dergham:** You have it you'll come to it I'm sure.

**Khoury:** Well that was the building as we've designed it and built it I think it was conceived around 2010. So it was about 10 years old. Not even it was completed in 2014. It was a relatively young building when it comes to the age of buildings because our work is usually permanent. Ten years is nothing for a building. But it's interesting because this building addressed the port. And I remember back at the presentation text of the concept back in 2009 it starts with a sentence, "Beirut is a port city." So that building really addressed the port. If you look at its silhouette in the skyline of the city in many photographs by different photographers it looks like a kind of sentinel almost overlooking the port in a sort of defensive posture. So it was very much contextual when it comes to addressing the port back then. [inaudible] I smile when I hear people say that this building was not contextual because for them Mar Mikhael is you know a very folklore sometimes very reductive dangerously nostalgic sugarcoated image that people can, you know, tend to have. It was a very contextual building because it addressed the port and strangely being 200 meters away from the port it was on the frontline and it was probably the most hit building of all of them. It is forensic architecture that did kind of estimated the power of the blast which had a diameter of combustion of 3.2 km so if you were anywhere within 1.6 km of the epicenter you were still within the bomb. My office is very close to the port, this whole place was completely totaled. I rehabilitated it in 2 weeks.

**R Dergham:** We had a bigger problem because the blast, the atomic bomb came into our living rooms Bernard as you know that's why I mean it was

**Khoury:** There's nothing between you and the epicenter of the blast. Nothing. And you are 200 meters away from the limits of the port. So I can imagine the power of the blast. Of course I spent the first few weeks not to say one or two months initially trying to do within my limited means an assessment of the power of the blast on the facade. Prior to being commissioned anything from the co-owners because the situation was very chaotic. We have lost lives in this building and so it was catastrophic but each one of us tried to do something and some people donated money and some people raised money some people my daughter went down and literally helped on the street and I thought the first thing to do was to try to rescue this building in a way or another. I didn't think like an architect but almost like a doctor in an emergency room when you get a patient that comes to you. So we spent a lot of time evaluating the power of the blast on the building and what you see I'm not gonna give you an architectural

**R Dergham:** I wanted really to see if your team has it the before and after just to give an idea for those who are looking at if you just have that picture from before and after the blast

**Khoury:** No I don't have the double picture

**R Dergham:** Yeah, yeah. Well anyway we probably could look at it. But at any rate go ahead Bernard because I wanna move on to asking you a couple of other questions. Go ahead.

**Khoury:** So this is basically what we've done is according to very thorough scientific surveys of the state of the panels because the composite aluminium panels that were on the facade regarding the state of the panels we've basically applied parameters into a software that has graphically according to a very mathematical formula has drawn vertices on these panels on the panels that have disappeared or are damaged and according to that it literally gave us scientific stitches that were traced on the facade that we translated later by literally physical stitches which is what you see here on the renderings

**R Dergham:** I got it thank you very much Bernard I'll go because the time is running out. Thank you but I need your team to make sure to give me back control of the screen because as long as we have the pictures I cannot see our guests and there we are we're all back thank you thank you very much Bernard. I'm gonna go to Nada Debs to tell me a little bit about her project that she just finished was in to the project I think it was commissioned, I don't know by whom it was commissioned if you are at liberty to say

**Debs:** The mapping exercise. It's actually a self ...

**R Dergham:** I meant the Arab league. The way

**Debs:** The Arab league, yes. It was commissioned by the UAE. It was a gift from the UAE government to the Arab League. And I was asked to design and renovate a hall and the lobbies around it. So this was to me a very strategic you know space because it is really where all the Arab leaders are grouped together. So for me you know what they did is they chose me because they saw that I had both the modernity in the work as well as appreciating the past. And so what I tried to do is retain a little bit of the past but really give it a much more cutting-edge feel to it. So I worked a lot with patterns, geometry, everything that is common in the Arab world. It was a very challenging project but a nice one.

**R Dergham:** And what about have you also did you think of luxury while you were doing that because you don't think luxury is a bad word you just said luxury is a necessity. You say it's giving value to our culture and heritage of the region. so you're not one of those people who are sort of uncomfortable with luxury. Can you explain yeah go ahead

**Debs:** I think it's the only way you know like Philippe Starck I don't know most people know him. His first chair was 900 USD and then you know the most recent one was in Target at 9 USD. So you know you start for bringing awareness you need to really start with luxury and to me yeah luxury is not really is a very overused word but it's really about slow design it's about things taking its time appreciating you know handcraft and so for me these are really important things and when you speak to craftsmen the way they speak about their work you're just drawn into that world and really it's so valuable. Cannot be reproduced.

**R Dergham:** Celine Semaan you speak of the need for brands and organizations to redefine values. What does that mean?

**Semaan:** You know values and value systems often help us as a compass guide us in decision-making and specifically for brands who are approaching us for their sustainability strategy they tend to want to go for what is more trendy for example like we're gonna reduce carbon we're gonna go carbon-neutral which means nothing really or we're going to you know use organic so-and-so etcetera and it is they're just going after whatever they heard on the news or trend is associated with sustainability. And what we tend to do at Slow Factory is take a step back and reassess values. Because your values can help you make decisions regarding your sustainability strategy, regarding what you wanna do for the climate, for human rights, and how to measure your decisions to make sure that your long-term plans are effective and are actually making a positive change. So the values really are a form of compass to decision-making.

**R Dergham:** And Thalia you speak also of cultivating internal brand culture. When you speak of empowering people to change their behaviors and perceptions to be culturally conscious what do you have in mind? What does that mean?

**T Dergham:** I think it's related to what Celine is saying, it's that you know if you as a business don't have an internal culture, workplace culture and the values you believe in and work towards bring into life aren't the same ones that you say that you care about externally or having a dialogue externally then essentially you aren't being true to what your goals are and everyone can see through that. I think it's very much about identifying what is the priority. Where I work is a very big business. It's an e-commerce platform and there are so many different things that we can prioritize as a business or goals. But we did prioritize for example sustainability and we did put a huge amount of time and effort in creating goals for 2030 even that are 100% strategically realized. So I think that's an example when you identify your values and then you put actionable strategies behind them internally and then you convey that to your community and you say this is what we're doing and actually anyone who doesn't do this might fall short and fall behind. So you're in an essence almost becoming an activist for the things you care about as a business because you're encouraging other businesses to do the same but you're also telling your community or your fashion community in this case, "This is the way things are going to be because we are who we are and we are cool and creative and we're going to make it exciting, we're going to make it compelling, we're not going to make it so that you're never gonna shop with us again obviously because these are not our priorities either." So that's really in terms of marrying those 2 things. If you say you have a progressive audience and progressive values, then you have to show them that's what you believe and show them you're going to change for that reason.

**R Dergham:** Bernard Khoury, if you have a very confused chaotic place like Beirut is, how does architecture have a political responsibility in history, you say that it should be non-consensual and not necessarily affirmative. What do you mean by that?

**Khoury:** I was taught and trained initially in the US and obviously like most architects of my generation I looked at Europe as a model and back in the 80s and the 90s if you didn't build anything public you were a failed architect. If you look at the Mitterrand years in Paris for instance it was very clearly marked on the territory. Architecture was a means of very clearly expressing a project, the State, historically a form of power. Where I come from here in Beirut there is I'm not gonna say it again the complete failure of the nation-state as we understand it in Western [countries], the complete failure of the institutions which leaves absolutely no room for architects to operate in let's say in any institutional architecture. Which is where architecture with a big A is practiced. This is what I was taught in school, museums, opera houses, palaces of justice, public housing, all of that is public. We didn't have that for the last 30 years. In fact we didn't have any of that for the last 40 or 50 years if not more. If you forget the Fouad Chehab years, this state hasn't built much. It is completely absent on the territory. So if you deeply believe that architecture is a political act and you come in that climate in Lebanon in the 1990s, you're very much deceived. So you try to find other territories to practice architecture in a meaningful way. You are forced to do that. There's no other way. And I find myself. The first building that I ever built was a nightclub. The last thing you would ever think that produces any sort of political meaning. Nightclubs are not even given an architecture. They're tucked in the basement of buildings. They're not looked at as anything that can have any sort of relevance. I've only done architecture for the private sector because with bankers, pirates, developers, entertainers, but hopefully trying to produce meaning where it was least expected. I wouldn't have done that if I was practicing in Paris or Berlin or Rotterdam. So Beirut forces you to develop other strategies and other ways to produce meaning in all creative fields, not only in architecture.

**R Dergham:** Bernard Khoury I'm gonna try to come back to you for one-minute conclusion I have only seven minutes left. Let me see if I could get back you otherwise I'm gonna consider that your last statement. Stay with me really brilliant and amazing. Nada Debs I'm gonna give you a minute and a half to conclude then whatever you think you just get the chance to say whatever you want your takeaway to be. Go ahead Nada.

**Debs:** I'm so in line with Bernard Khoury in terms of staying here and keeping on reinventing the you know pushing our boundaries. There's so much that we can do here and I think you know in all circumstances keep pushing us in different directions but we're always finding ways to deal with it. And this is something that we're very good at and you know I'm here until we cannot be and I feel that today there's a way forward. There's some light at the end of the tunnel. And we have to keep going.

**R Dergham:** And you will. You'll do that very well continue doing what you're doing Nada Debs we're very proud of you. Celine Semaan, one and a half minute to you

**Semaan:** I just want to encourage everyone to embark on a sustainability journey and to approach it like a spectrum. It's not a yes/no answer, it's not an all or nothing, it's an all of the above and I hope that you know we'll have more and more opportunity to work across sectors to really meet the goals, the climate goals and the human right goals that we have set for ourselves. Thank you.

**R Dergham:** I think I have one more question for you Celine because I didn't [inaudible]. Because I interrupted you when you were trying to explain a couple of the points that you wanted to make but I'm fascinated by your insistence on the social justice matter. When you're talking about design, when you're talking about architecture, you always emphasize social justice. How do we achieve that? One minute, go ahead.

**Semaan:** How do we achieve that where in Lebanon for example?

**R Dergham:** No not only because when you think of social justice it's also a matter of definition sometimes, unfortunately.

**Semaan:** Of course. But you know as Bernard and Nada said each in their own perspective and their own discipline they observe it as a political act and I think similarly design is a political act. And when we look at it this way it's impossible not to include social justice. What is social justice? It is equity, justice, it is human rights, it is designing for communities, designing with communities not just for them but with them, it's instead of a top-down way of functioning, it is a bottom-up which is very similar to the uprising that we've seen in Lebanon, which is very similar to the response after August 4th in Lebanon itself. How communities came together. It also puts the government in a way where they are disposable in a way, where we don't necessarily need those top-down structures, what we need is to design bottom-up structures and ways that we can uplift and elevate one another that is the role of design that I see and that I practice.

**R Dergham:** Thank you so much Celine Semaan. Thalia Dergham, a minute and a half to you.

**T Dergham:** Yeah I think for me it's really about conveying that these types of conversation where we speak about creativity and fashion and luxury in the context of a more usually political forum. I think it's a really important opportunity because you know Celine and I are working together now in a professional capacity after being introduced by you through the Beirut Institute. It's an unlikely forum to bring 2 people together from different industries, one in primarily social justice and sustainability, and one in fashion e-commerce. But actually if you take the time to bring out these themes that unite us, in terms of from architecture, design, to sustainability in fashion you see that there's a lot of overlap in terms of how we can help one another to bring these thoughts to life. And I think that's very much what people are realizing in creative industries today, I think is that the more partnerships that you do with people who are really an expert in either their region or their certain fields, you can work with them to really understand how you can benefit in a more authentic way to bring that message to your audience. It's a huge advantage so thank you for bringing us together and yeah great to hear from everyone else as well.

**R Dergham:** Bernard Khoury I am coming back to you for 45 seconds closing statement, actually 30 seconds go ahead

**Khoury:** I'm happy to see such a diversity of combats on this table and I mean combat in a very positive way. Wonderful bouquet, I might be the only parasite here.

**R Dergham:** on the contrary.