

A Space Museum

On the 28th July 1962, Oscar Niemeyer arrives in Beirut. Having recently completed the monumental Brasilia project in his home country, he is one of the most celebrated architects in the world. The following Monday, Niemeyer is received by the President of the Republic, Fouad Chebab, who had commissioned the International and Permanent Fair of Lebanon in Tripoli that Niemeyer is to design.

That same summer The Lebanese Rocket Society, a group of students engaged in space exploration at Haigazian University and led by their mathematics professor Manoug Manougian launch two rockets into space: Cedar IIB and Cedar IIC. The launches, made possible by the funds that Chebab had assigned to the society the previous year, were widely reported in the press. From 1960 – 1967, more than ten rockets were sent into the Lebanese sky and plans for a satellite were developed before the project was suddenly interrupted, and strangely forgotten.

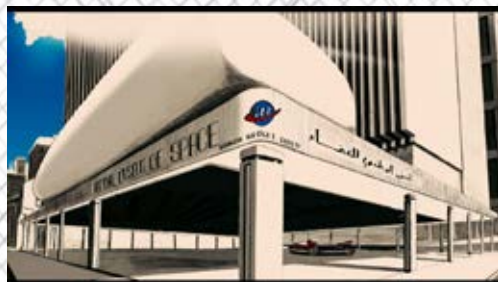
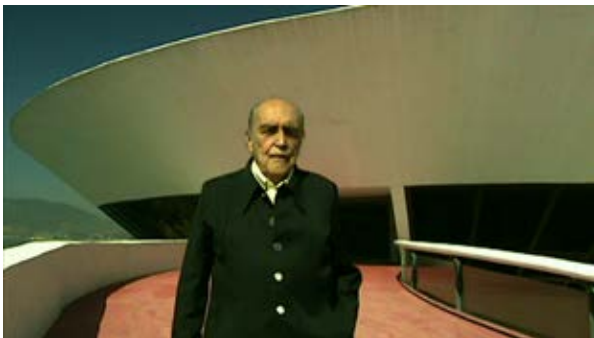
These two projects, independent of each other are yet inextricably linked and find common ground within an almost hidden room beneath the helipad that stands at the centre of Niemeyer's fair. This structure was intended to be a Space Museum, 'bearing lasting witness to the evolution of the conquest of the cosmos,' in the words of its architect. And had it survived, it would have been one of the first of its kind. But both projects were suspended, halted in their tracks.

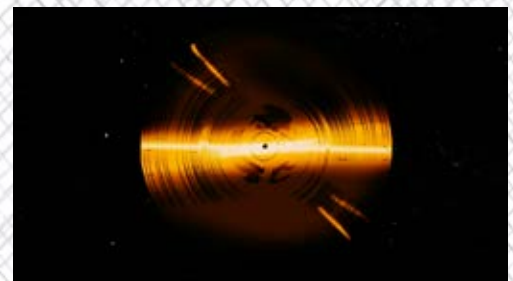
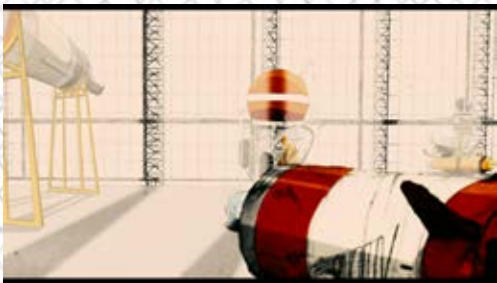
Could Niemeyer have designed this Space Museum with the intent of exhibiting The Lebanese Rocket Society's achievements? Both projects are animated by the same political desire for change, revolution, anti-imperialism, scientific knowledge and human progress, by the sense of being contemporary, of sharing the same time with the rest of the world. In reactivating them in the present, without nostalgia, the Space Museum and The Lebanese Rocket Society are brought together for the first time, in order to reflect on political utopias, modernism, failure and the dreams of science fiction.

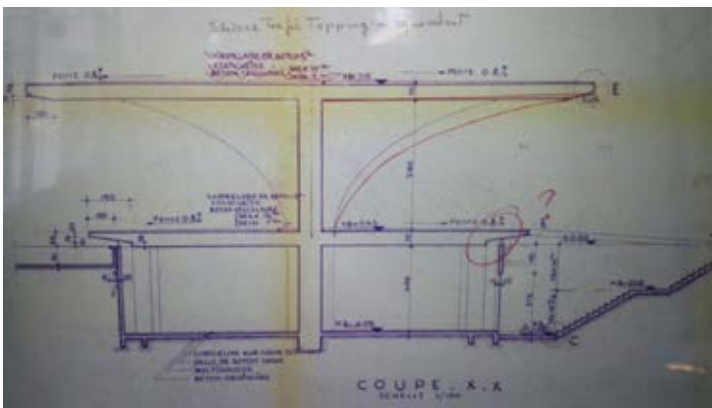
JOANNA HADJITHOMAS
& KHALIL JOREIGE

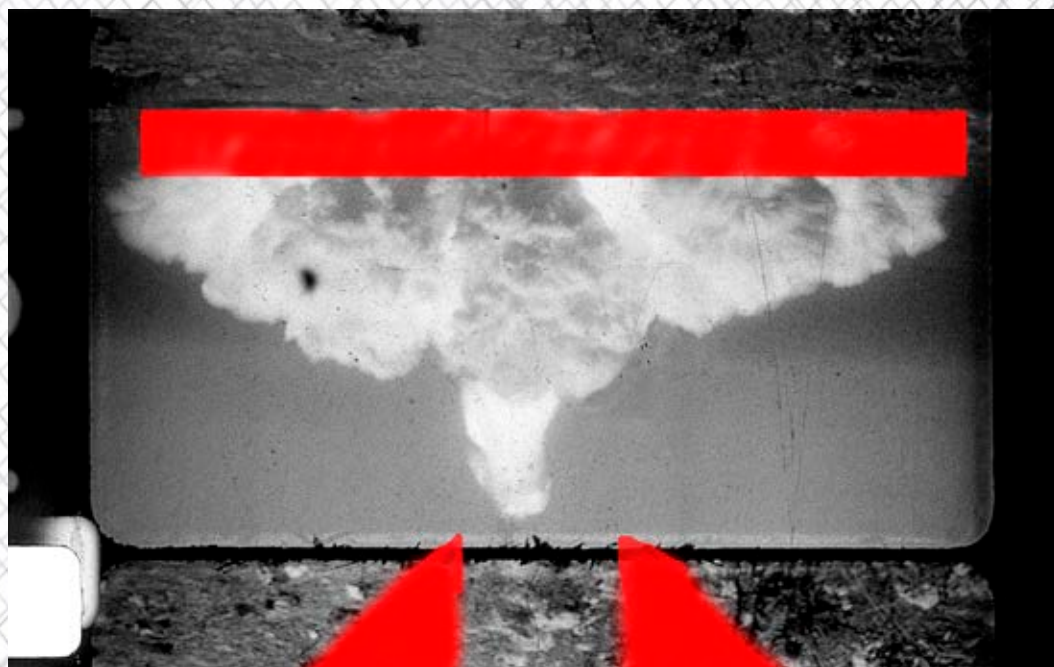
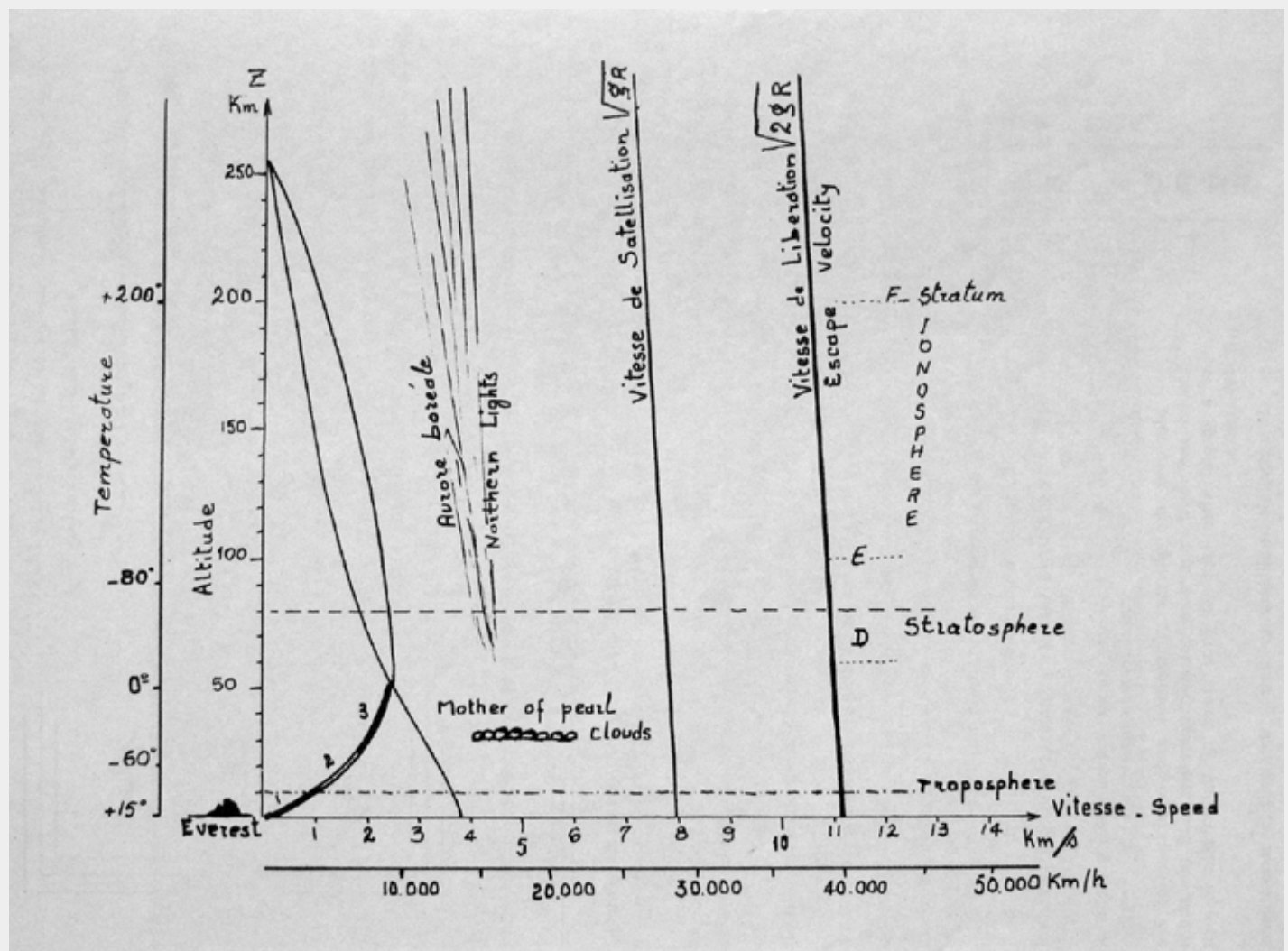


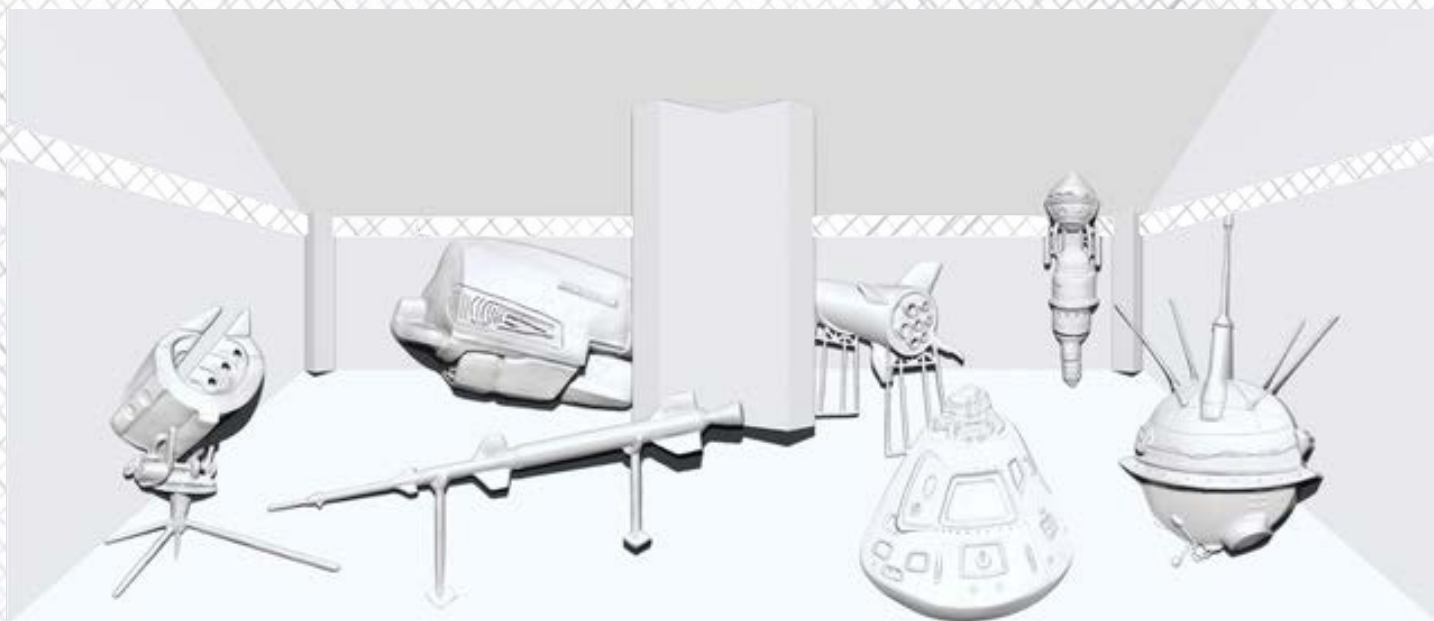


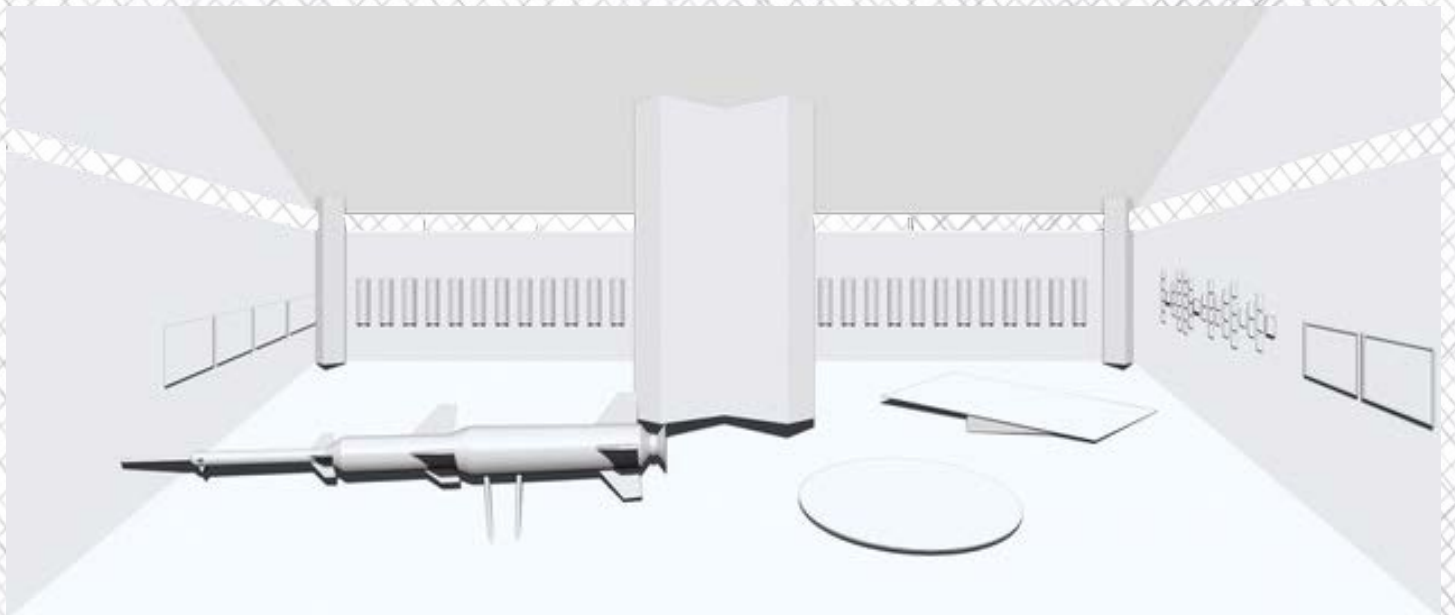












Page 24: The helicopter landing apron and The Space Museum at The Rashid Karami International Fair, by Oscar Niemeyer. Photo by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

Page 25: The Lebanese Rocket Society in front of Cedar III, 1962
© archive of The Rocket Society, ARR

Page 24 and 25, below: Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Restaged, part IV of the Lebanese Rocket Society project, photographic print each 100 x 70 cm 2012
© The artists and Galerie In Situ – fabienne Leclerc (Paris).

Page 26: Stills from Oscar Niemeyer, un architecte engagé dans le siècle, a film by Marc-Henri Wajnberg
© Wajnbrose Productions

Page 27: Launch of Cedar IIA, 1961
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Page 26 and 27, below: Film stills from animated section by Chassan Halwani for the feature documentary The Lebanese Rocket Society: The Strange Tale of the Lebanese Space Race, by Joana Hadjithomas, and Khalil Joreige, produced by Abbout Productions and Mille et Une Productions, 2013.

Page 28: Plans and drawings for The Space Museum, extract from Oscar Niemeyer, "Lebanon permanent international fair at Tripoli" modulo 30 (1962)
Launch of Cedar IIA, 1962
© archive of The Rocket Society, ARR

Page 29: Graph extract from page 6 from the bilingual booklet published November 22, 1962, on the occasion of Lebanese Independence Day for the launching of Cedar III. Notice the size of Everest bottom left.
© Haigazian Archive, ARR

Page 28 and 29, below: Inverted photograph of unknown rocket launch by The Lebanese Rocket Society, with red and black structural interventions
© Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

Page 5 and 6, below: Sketches by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige
Research and studio manager: Steven Daly

Page 30 and 31: Work in progress for Scenario for a museum, three possible narratives:
a) The Space Museum with elements taken from the animation of Chassan Halwani in the film The Lebanese Rocket Society
b) The Space Museum based on documentation from the exhibition of The Lebanese Rocket Society at Haigazian University in 1965
c) The Space Museum with artworks by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige related to the Lebanese Rocket Society

Sculpture in alabaster, copper, Work in progress, 2018
In collaboration with 3D printing, Material Labs, and Maatouk.
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