

# COLLECTING STORIES ... SONGS AND HEARTBEATS



## FROM BEIRUT TO SAIDA, YA MY EYES

Al Solh often includes song lyrics, voices and singing in her work using them as a way to share stories. Music and dance play an important role in Lebanese culture and society, acting as a form of relief and resilience. Al Solh often listens to music as she paints. In some of the works in *A land as big as her skin* Al Solh draws upon popular and familiar song lyrics. *From Beirut to Saida, Ya my Eyes* focuses on an iconic love song sung by Samira Toufic, a Lebanese singer. In the painting, a red car drives past a seaside promenade packed with people, many of whom are in exile as a result of war. Toufic sings:

Stop coming to our neighbourhood  
Stop coming to our neighbourhood, my dear (my eyes)  
And looking all around us, oh god  
Are your eyes on our neighbour, my dear (my eyes)  
Or are your eyes on us, oh god  
What brought you to our neighbourhood, my dear (my eyes)  
You're hiding in the alleys, oh god  
You won't find any brides here, my dear (my eyes)  
Just a stick to beat you, oh god  
Between Beirut and Saida  
A red car passed by  
That was your car, my dear (my eyes)  
I knew it from the license plate

## ENTA OMRI (YOU ARE MY LIFE)

In the sound work which can be heard throughout the stairwells and foyer Al Solh sings a love song – *Enta Omri (You are my life)* – made famous by the Egyptian singer Oum Kalthoum and written by Ahmed Shafik Kamel. Kalthoum is one of the most well-known singers in the Arabic world and remained popular from the 1920s until her death in 1975.

Loved by rich and poor alike, her durational songs explore themes of love, longing and loss. Often lasting more than an hour each, the length of her songs was dictated by the relationship and connection between audience and singer, creating emotional and heartfelt performances. Al Solh's recording of the song is played on a continuous loop throughout the exhibition. The opening lines of *Enta Omri (You Are My Life)* are translated below:

Your eyes returned me to the days that had gone by  
They taught me to regret the past and its wounds  
That which I experienced before my eyes saw you  
What is the wasted life to me?

You are my life whose morning began with your light  
How much of my life before you has passed and gone by  
My darling, how much of my life has gone  
My heart never experienced one bit of joy before you  
And had never tasted in this world anything but the flavor of injury  
I've now just begun to love my life  
I've now begun to fear for the passing of my lifetime  
Every joy that I longed for before you was fantasy  
My heart and mind meet find it in the light of your eyes  
Oh life of my heart, oh you who is more precious than my life  
Why didn't I meet your love, my darling, sooner?

The sweet nights and the desire and the love  
For so long my heart carried them for you  
Taste love with me  
Taste love with love  
From the feeling of my heart whose desire extended to your feeling  
Give me your eyes they reflect my eyes in their world  
Give me your hands their touch calms my hands  
Oh my darling come on forget about that which has passed us