

intro

One could argue that photographer Eli Rezkallah was born in an imaginary world, also known as Lebanon, circa 1986. While there's nothing imaginary about the sectarian conflict and civil war that plagued his native country for decades, Rezkallah lived his formative years sheltered in a picture-perfect beachfront resort on the Lebanese Mediterranean coast, filled with extravagance, fashion, and color, yet surrounded by conflict, anxiety, and trauma.

There's something to be said about living an immaculate childhood that is constantly under threat of annihilation. No matter the false sense of safety, no matter the beauty of one's immediate surroundings, if the foundation is consistently shaken, how can a child find a proper footing during their most crucial formative years?

As every origin story goes, there comes a moment when curiosity for the outside world takes over. When Rezkallah stepped out into the real world, it didn't take long for him to come to the conclusion that it does not live up to the hype. One look outside his carefully curated bubble was enough to make him ask himself: "Is that all there is?"

This book will examine how dark deep-rooted inner conflict can translate into marvelous, vibrant, and whimsical art, through Rezkallah's arduous journey of self-realization, self-acceptance, and healing.

summer ¹²

mother ⁵⁶

women ¹⁰⁰

play ¹⁴⁰

drag ¹⁸⁰



To Rezkallah, summer is not just a season; it's a state of mind - his ultimate emblem of freedom. Inhibitions fade under the heated sun, as colors shine brighter, palm trees cast their shade onto the poolside, clothing becomes optional, and hedonism takes over... until it's gone.

Summer is also a staple of Rezkallah's body of work. Overhead shots of beach bodies basking in the sun's sizzling heat with the unapologetic pursuit of pleasure is an image the photographer often revisits, albeit with a twist. His subjects, whether confronting us with their exposed bodies through bold eye contact or flippantly dismissing the photographer's lens, are carefully manicured to the point of oblivion. Rezkallah's summer is not of the spring break variety, but rather, a more meditative, carefully curated depiction of indulgence and clout - numb, blissful, unaware, and thankless bodies, basking in their privilege till summer's end.



pool view from rezkallah's balcony, santa theresa playa, okaibe, lebanon, 1987.





*"There's nothing
more depressing
than an empty
pool at the end
of a summer."*



nohad rezkallah, jounieh, lebanon, 1990.

While Rezkallah's father was the provider, his mother became a master illusionist. Every day was a new reason to dress to the nines, revamp one's style, and celebrate life as loudly as the shells exploding next door... She was loud, unfiltered, vain, eccentric, and always the main source of entertainment: Anyone who knew her couldn't help but admire this force of nature who seemed to be in complete control of her own destiny and always living her best life. Little did they know that she was constantly fighting off crippling anxiety that kept trying to surface.

To this day, Rezkallah has a soft spot for his mother, profoundly touched by the fact that she would rather live a fantasy than face reality. Her coping mechanism became a great source of inspiration. With delusion as her weapon, he witnessed how a woman at her most vulnerable, could mask her fears and anxieties using the power of denial and project strength, joy, and light instead.



nohad rezkallah, saframarine, safra, lebanon, september 1988.



mother with a camera, beirut, lebanon, dare greatly documentary, 2017.













nohad, rami and eli rezkallah, santa theresa playa, okaibe, lebanon, december 1989.



