Parasites

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In 2019, AA invited architect Marc Barani as guest editor. Among the projects featured in that issue No.432 was the memorial to former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri he designed in Beirut. As we finalise the pages of another issue entrusted to a guest editor, this time the artist Tadashi Kawamata, it is difficult, just a few days after the explosion of such extraordinary violence that has ravaged the Lebanese capital, not to think with great sadness of the soil sculpted so skilfully for a city so dear to AA. Can Beirut and its inhabitants, so often described as the most resilient among us, rise again from the ashes? We can only hope so and do what we can to support them in their endeavours.

Beirut didn't know it, but at its very heart, its port, it hid a most destructive parasite, the cause of the calamity: 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate. Fortunately there exist less destructive parasites. Such is art work in cities, having the power to render hospitable places that used to be hostile. This is exactly what Kawamata's work is about: feeding on the existing but also, in return, changing our perception of it. When he agreed to look at the theme of 'Parasites' for AA, turning it over and over throughout the pages, it is primarily because he sees his works as organisms dependent on other organisms, on the city, primarily. Yet this doesn't prevent him from showing in galleries, in Kamel Mennour's Paris gallery in particular. Tadashi Kawamata sees no contradiction there: a commission does not represent a restriction for him, any more than the white walls of a reputed gallery. Inside as well as out, inside and outside, on the ground, in the sky… His field of invention is all space. His work, and even more so his approach as an artist, which might seem derisory in the light of catastrophes such as that of Beirut, are in fact all the more vital: as the architect Lina Ghotmeh signals over the following pages, art and architecture have the power to rise as a rampart against destruction.