

Walid Raad

A

Acknowledgements

أسماء
بيروت
Bibliographie

لبدائيات (١٩٦٠ - ١٩٥٠)

BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

B

Contents

Conclusion: Arab Art Today

C

دراسة الفن في بيروت

Dessins

Drawings

الفنون التشكيلية اللبنانية

F

فترة الحرب

فناني الحقبة (١٩٦٥ - ١٩١٥)

Fleurs

Flowers

G

G

جميع الفنانين اللبنانيين للرسم والنحت

G

H

H

H

H

H

J

قلم الرسم والتصوير

K

K

المرحلة الحالية (١٩٩١ حتى الآن)

ملامح الفن الطباعي في لبنان

Nus

Nudes

O

رسامو لبنان خلال مراحل الفن

Natures mortes

Still life

Sujets divers Miscellaneous

Scènes folkloriques Folk scenes

S

S

صالة

S

S


S

S

وزارة الثقافة والتعليم العالي

Works

Z



Walid

The Museum of Modern Art

Raad

Eva Respini

With a contribution by Walid Raad
and an essay by Finbarr Barry Flood

| | |
|----|---|
| 6 | Foreword |
| 7 | Acknowledgments |
| 9 | I Thought I'd Escape My Fate, but Apparently Walid Raad |
| 28 | Slippery Delays and Optical Mysteries: The Work of Walid Raad Eva Respini |

49

The Atlas Group

110

Scratching on Things I Could Disavow

| | |
|-----|---|
| 161 | Staging Traces of Histories Not Easily Disavowed Finbarr Barry Flood |
| 175 | Key to Plates |
| 177 | Selected Bibliography |
| 186 | Selected Exhibition History |
| 189 | Performance Chronology |
| 191 | Lenders to the Exhibition |
| 192 | Trustees of The Museum of Modern Art |

Staging Traces of Histories Not Easily Disavowed

Finbarr Barry Flood

The museum is a colossal mirror in which man contemplates himself, in short, in all his aspects, finds himself literally admirable and abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in all the art journals.

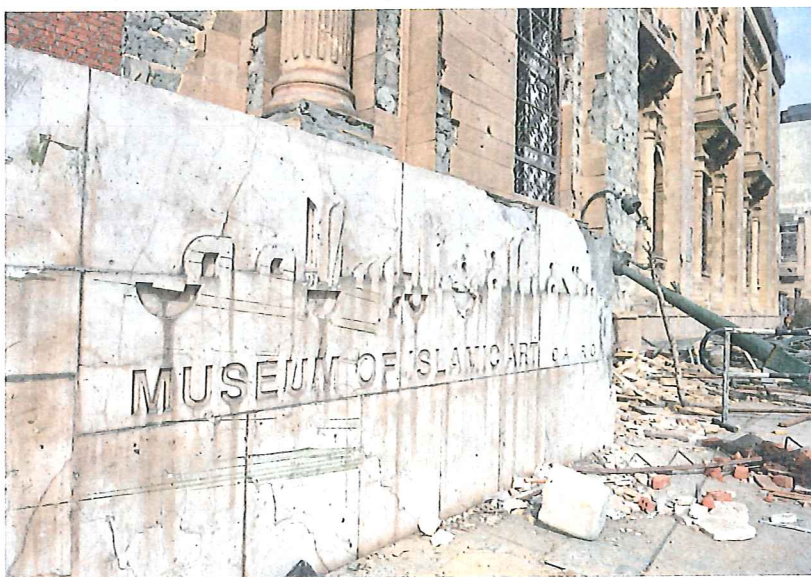
—Georges Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, 1929–30

Over the past decade, major museums in Cairo, Copenhagen, Detroit, Doha, Kuwait, London, New York, and other cities have installed or reinstalled their collections of Islamic art. The results have attracted bouquets and brickbats in equal measure. Some of these museums house collections whose origins lie in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century intersections between antiquarianism, commercialism, and orientalism. Others, especially those in the Gulf, house collections of more recent vintage, whose acquisition over the past two decades has infused the market with a giddy frisson of excess seldom previously associated with Islamic art.¹

This reinvestment of Islamic antiquities has been paralleled by the development of Middle Eastern franchises of museums such as the Guggenheim and the Louvre in Abu Dhabi, and the global emergence of an extensive array of galleries and museums dedicated to showcasing the modern and contemporary art of the Middle East. These range from small commercial galleries and private spaces in cities such as Beirut, Cairo, London, New York, and Ramallah to national institutions such as Doha's Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, whose opening in 2010 signaled the role of the Gulf region in the vanguard

of these developments. At the same time, biennials, exhibitions, and foundations for the collection and promotion of modern and contemporary "Islamic" art have proliferated in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Modern Middle Eastern art is enjoying an ongoing canonization as a field of collecting and study (both in its own right and as a chapter in the history of global modernism), witnessed by the establishment of professorships, the writing of doctoral dissertations, and the appointment of curators to such august institutions as the British Museum in London and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

These developments have taken place against a background of tumultuous political instability and violence in the Middle East, from the United States-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, through Israel's 2006 war on Lebanon, to the revolutions of the Arab Spring, the reassertion of a U.S.-funded military dictatorship in Egypt, and the transformation of a popular uprising against a brutal Syrian dictatorship into a proxy war fueled by the very petrodollars with which Gulf states are sponsoring their cultural infrastructures and institutions. The worlds of political violence and of the museum have occasionally intersected, with disastrous consequences: in January 2014, the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, the world's oldest museum of Islamic art, was seriously damaged when a car bomb detonated outside the police quarters across the road and almost entirely destroyed the museum's facade, along with many prize artifacts (fig. 1).



1 Damage to the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, after a bombing across the street on January 24, 2014

Tensions between contemporary geopolitics, the emergence of major art institutions across the Arab world, and the economic developments that underwrite both provide the background to Valid Raad's latest project. *Scratching on things I could disavow* (2007–) is an amorphous congeries of intersecting images and texts meticulously crafted to interrogate the cultural, economic, material, and political infrastructures that produce and sustain certain kinds of work as art, while questioning the nature of the archives that enable us to write histories of and from artworks. *Scratching . . .* is an amorphous history of Arab art staged through images, installations, tales, and texts, an assemblage perhaps best encapsulated by the Arabic word *athar*, which can be variously translated as antiquity, impression, mark, relic, remnant, ruin, or vestige. Raad's carefully staged constellations of artifacts, images, and narratives are loosely associated by their relation to the histories and historiographies of artistic production in the Arab world, both long entrenched and more recent. They include canonical artifacts of Islamic art, paradigmatic works of Arab modernism that have undergone more recent canonization, and a contemporary canon that is currently under construction and contestation.

The measured ambivalence that permeates the project is implicit both in the conditional disavowal that it evokes and in the "scratching" of the project's title, with its dual sense of surface archaeology and the relief of capitulating to the masochistic urge to rake one's fingers across an irritation. In this as in all of Raad's work, the materials of and for any history are

fragmentary, disjunctive, and recalcitrant. Authoritative data presented as charts and diagrams resist easy co-option or circumscription by practices of representation, being simultaneously offered and withdrawn, asserting even while denying their own historicity. The play with statistical authority in the form of precise dates and carefully numbered captions is also typical. Titles appropriate the standard categories of teleological time while frustrating the expectations that they generate: prefaces, appendixes, interrupted sequences, random dates, partial views, and tantalizing excerpts of orphaned fascicles extracted from series that might never have been or never be—all assert the authority of the catalogue or monograph while simultaneously undermining it. The dialectic between the authority of Roman and Arabic numerals in the sequences of the titles only doubles the play.

Raad co-opts the space of the gallery or museum to autopsy the range of institutions that produce and sustain art as history. He turns his forensic gaze not only on the architectural space of the gallery but also on its sustaining infrastructures, including the institutional gestures and tics that constitute its role as part of the frame that gives work cultural and economic value: the lecture, the PowerPoint presentation, the dissertation, the catalogue essay. Like Raad's earlier Atlas Group project, *Scratching . . .* enacts the way that stories spun around objects alter their meaning and value and hence their stability as historical reifications. The project is, in effect, a meta-curation, a performative restaging of the elusive artifacts, histories, practices, and

spaces that it engages, with Raad as choreographer, impresario, and medium overseeing installations marked by displacement, shape-shifting, and time travel.

This “meta” quality is enhanced by the imprimatur that *Scratching* . . . has received not only from long-established sanctuaries of Islamic art but also from newly emergent sites of pilgrimage to the modern and contemporary art of the Arab world. The reopening of the galleries of the Louvre's Département des Arts de l'Islam in 2012 (fig. 2), for example, was accompanied by a series of commissioned works by Raad, which took as their subjects the department's star objects. Among these, Raad's 2013 work *Preface to the third edition* (2013; pp. 150, 157) is a handsome portfolio containing luxurious images of twenty-eight canonical objects of Islamic art in the Louvre's collection. An accompanying text (p. 148) explains that these are among the 294 objects from the Louvre that will travel to the museum's new Abu Dhabi franchise (designed by starchitect Jean Nouvel) at some point between 2016 and 2046. On the journey, the text observes, these twenty-eight works will undergo changes whose causes will be contested but that may be material—results of the change in climate, for example; immaterial, manifesting only in the dreams and disorders of the non-Emirati workers constructing such temples of culture; or aesthetic, manifesting only once: in the portfolio's twenty-eight polychrome photos, purportedly the work of a female artist sponsored to work in the museum in 2026.

The mutations evoked in *Preface to the third edition* are multiple, from the transformation of three-dimensional artifacts into two-dimensional photographs to the superimposition of one artifact's surface patterns onto another. This latter cross-fertilization subverts function in the production of striking hybrids, as when a dense floral pattern from a lacquer book-cover comes to pattern the handle of a dagger, or the form of a metal helmet is inhabited by the delicate translucent surface of a medieval rock-crystal vessel. The helmet image is among those that reappear in *Footnote II* (2015; pp. 150–51), a recent installation in which photographs and models of Raad's transformations of the Louvre's objects are mounted against densely layered archival shots, palimpsest images of the vitrines that once constrained them. *Preface to the third edition* offers spectacularly beautiful ways of rethinking these objects, destabilizing their deployment as institutionalized representatives of singular times and spaces while presenting canonical artifacts as objets trouvés, like those that feature in Raad's Atlas Group work.

The process of materialization and transubstantiation assumes more dynamic aspects in the video *Preface to the fourth edition* (2012). Here, prime objects in the Louvre's Islamic collection—ceramics, crystals, ivories, metalwork, textiles—flick and flit by the viewer's gaze, eventually merging and morphing into a dense vortex of incoherent forms and unstable hues. This then resolves into a series of chromatic verticals of variable densities and thicknesses (fig. 3), similar to those that recur in the mixed-media *Section 88_Act XXII: Views from outer*



2 Département des Arts de l'Islam, Musée du Louvre, Paris. 2012. In the foreground: vitrine 9, showing, left to right, the peacock aquamanile, a ewer, and the pyxis of al-Mughira

were ever simple) but of the archive through which histories of war (or histories in general) are constituted—fragments worn and torn, ripped from their context in order to preserve the testimonies that they are made to instantiate. Under interrogation, all such documents are produced, valorized, valued, and enshrined through a process of stratification or winnowing that divides the wheat from the chaff, the historically significant from the apparently contingent.

Yet it is precisely in the promise or potential of the contingent, the ephemeral, that the possibility of a counterhegemonic history emerges. For Toufic, the works and documents subject to immaterial withdrawal after a surpassing disaster—books, films, monuments, photographs, paintings—remain available to the hegemonic histories promoted by perpetrators and victors, while those affected by the disaster are compelled to resurrect these same works. In *Scratching . . .*, objects, documents, and images afforded archival status as marooned instantiations of (often contested) histories are manifest not as historical documents but in ways recalling Toufic's suggestion that, following a surpassing disaster, "while the documentation of the referent is for the future, the presentation of the withdrawal is an urgent task for the present."⁵ In both Toufic's writings and Raad's practice, the strategies of presenting withdrawal are multiple, including blurring, displacement, textual mediation, and temporal destabilization.⁶

In this sense Raad's move from archive to museum is a natural one. A corollary of the recent rise of interest in modern Arab

art, for example, is a headlong dash not simply to the archive but to *constitute* it, with varying results. In an arch in-joke, Raad's *Appendix XVIII: Plates 56–58 Dr. Kirsten Scheid's Fabulous Archive* (2008) plays with the anthropologist's or art historian's need for archives in order to resurrect occluded histories and the desire that permeates that archival quest. Named after a celebrated Beirut-based scholar of modern Arab art, the work includes blurry miniature reproductions of artworks, collated and collected yet still somehow inaccessible. Similarly, *Preface to the fifth edition* (2014) explores the mutually constituting relation between museum artifacts and archival ephemera, juxtaposing blurry photographs of museum objects with curatorial notes, statistical observations, and the sketches and reports of conservators.

Like much of Raad's earlier work, *Scratching . . .* suggests that the project of resurrecting past histories of art is not simply a matter of bringing them to light, of (re-)establishing them by constructing archives necessarily permeated by contingency and ephemerality. On the contrary, it is a more fundamental matter of staging the relation between the material and immaterial qualities of artworks, of interrogating the relationships between accessibility, temporality, and visibility. Here Raad's approach is clearly inspired by Toufic's idea that the ultimate goal of artists operating in the wake of a surpassing disaster is the resurrection of withdrawn works, the overcoming of their immaterial withdrawal. Pending that resurrection, however, the artist's mandate is to present a withdrawal of a

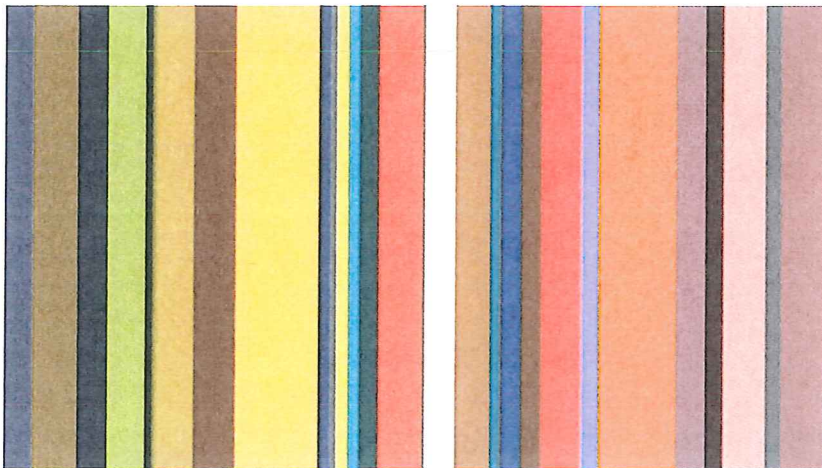
to inner compartments (2012–). The extraction of pure color and form from images of historical objects, producing traces of traces, resonates with a core concept of *Scratching . . .*: according to a text accompanying one of its works, *Appendix XVIII: Plates 22–257* (2008–; pp. 138–43), the Lebanese wars of the past three decades displaced lines and shapes, colors and forms, which sought refuge not in artworks but in their sustaining documentary infrastructures: budgets, catalogues, covers, diagrams, fonts and footnotes, price lists and the titles of dissertations (especially those by foreign scholars of Lebanese art)—in short, the sorts of materials that feature prominently throughout *Scratching . . .*

The transformation of historical artifacts into chromatic abstractions suggests the unstable relation between the museum object and the institutional and material frames that produce and sustain it. Recalling the twentieth-century valorizations of Islamic art as an art of abstraction,² Raad's transformations also manifest one of the most original and radical aspects of *Scratching . . .*: its subversion of the temporal taxonomies that govern the presentation of art, whether in gallery or museum, lecture or text, stratifying the premodern from the modern and both from the contemporary.³ That the historical objects of Islamic art are capable of this kind of transformation suggests more complex imbrications between past and present, underlining the fact that Raad's history of art in the Arab world neither begins nor ends with modernism. His production of fugitive color from the material certainties of

historical objects is an interrogation not simply of chronology, taxonomy, the museum, or even the histories of Arab art, but of the conditions of visibility necessary for the production of histories *tout court*. In *Scratching . . .* as in much of Raad's work, questions of legibility, visibility, and temporality are mutually implicating.

As Raad has often acknowledged, his work is indebted to the writings of the Lebanese artist and philosopher Jalal Toufic. In suggesting why colors, forms, lines, and shapes may have sought refuge in unlikely places, the introductory text for *Scratching . . .* cites Toufic's idea of "the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster," an idea developed in an eponymous book of 2009.⁴ Toufic suggests that in the wake of a surpassing disaster—the atomic bombings of 1945, or the series of catastrophes that have hit the Arab world since the 1980s—certain artistic, literary, and musical works remain immaterially withdrawn. Artifacts, buildings, documents, and paintings may persist in a material sense but are unavailable to those directly affected by the surpassing disaster, being seen but at the same time experienced and engaged with as if unavailable to vision. The idea owes something to a distinction between *zahir* and *batin*, between exoteric and esoteric, form and essence, in mystical strains of Islamic thought.

The notion that artworks might be both materially present and immaterially withdrawn calls into question the way histories, historical events, and memories are constituted, and by whom. The problem is the violence not simply of war (as if that



3 Walid Raad. Preface to the fourth edition. 2012. Still from single-channel video (color, silent), 12 min. 49 sec.

were ever simple) but of the archive through which histories of war (or histories in general) are constituted—fragments worn and torn, ripped from their context in order to preserve the testimonies that they are made to instantiate. Under interrogation, all such documents are produced, valorized, valued, and enshrined through a process of stratification or winnowing that divides the wheat from the chaff, the historically significant from the apparently contingent.

Yet it is precisely in the promise or potential of the contingent, the ephemeral, that the possibility of a counterhegemonic history emerges. For Toufic, the works and documents subject to immaterial withdrawal after a surpassing disaster—books, films, monuments, photographs, paintings—remain available to the hegemonic histories promoted by perpetrators and victors, while those affected by the disaster are compelled to resurrect these same works. In *Scratching . . .*, objects, documents, and images afforded archival status as marooned instantiations of (often contested) histories are manifest not as historical documents but in ways recalling Toufic's suggestion that, following a surpassing disaster, "while the documentation of the referent is for the future, the presentation of the withdrawal is an urgent task for the present."⁵ In both Toufic's writings and Raad's practice, the strategies of presenting withdrawal are multiple, including blurring, displacement, textual mediation, and temporal destabilization.⁶

In this sense Raad's move from archive to museum is a natural one. A corollary of the recent rise of interest in modern Arab

art, for example, is a headlong dash not simply to the archive but to *constitute* it, with varying results. In an arch in-joke, Raad's *Appendix XVIII: Plates 56–58 Dr. Kirsten Scheid's Fabulous Archive* (2008) plays with the anthropologist's or art historian's need for archives in order to resurrect occluded histories and the desire that permeates that archival quest. Named after a celebrated Beirut-based scholar of modern Arab art, the work includes blurry miniature reproductions of artworks, collated and collected yet still somehow inaccessible. Similarly, *Preface to the fifth edition* (2014) explores the mutually constituting relation between museum artifacts and archival ephemera, juxtaposing blurry photographs of museum objects with curatorial notes, statistical observations, and the sketches and reports of conservators.

Like much of Raad's earlier work, *Scratching . . .* suggests that the project of resurrecting past histories of art is not simply a matter of bringing them to light, of (re-)establishing them by constructing archives necessarily permeated by contingency and ephemerality. On the contrary, it is a more fundamental matter of staging the relation between the material and immaterial qualities of artworks, of interrogating the relationships between accessibility, temporality, and visibility. Here Raad's approach is clearly inspired by Toufic's idea that the ultimate goal of artists operating in the wake of a surpassing disaster is the resurrection of withdrawn works, the overcoming of their immaterial withdrawal. Pending that resurrection, however, the artist's mandate is to present a withdrawal of a

kind that manifests itself only fleetingly and incompletely. It can be discerned in a film's closing credits, for example, or in the photograph that performs not in its historical role as an archival document, an index of the past available to the present, but as an index of immaterial withdrawal, capable of preserving its blurred or off-center referent only in a future time, when the work of resurrection has been completed.⁷ In passages rich with resonances for *Scratching . . .*, Toufic proposes that an appropriate locus for the display of such photographic indexes of withdrawal would be the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, where the theft of thirteen paintings by Degas, Rembrandt, Vermeer, and others on March 18, 1990, is memorialized by the continued display of the empty frames from which they were cut (p. 45, fig. 24).⁸ In this way Toufic suggests how two distinct forms of absence or unavailability might be enshrined in the gallery, with photographic indexes of immaterial withdrawal complementing frames that memorialize material evanescence.

Several component works of *Scratching . . .*, among them the mixed-media installations *Preface to the first edition* (2014; p. 44, fig. 21) and *Section 88: Views from outer to inner compartments*, literalize Raad's engagement with practices of framing, functioning as stage sets that co-opt while echoing the framing role of the gallery itself. The principle operates in a cascading series of registers, from a vista of open doorways that leads the eye from one gallery space to the next (offering the tantalizing promise of a vanishing point that never quite

appears) through material frames that articulate, define, and punctuate the space of the gallery, devices ranging from elegant classical door-jambs to skirting boards, walls, and picture frames, epitomes of an entire infrastructure of enframing (pp. 122–27). A text (pp. 124–25) accompanying *Section 88: Views from outer to inner compartments* negates the invitation of these open doors and frames, telling the tale of a hypothetical resident of an unnamed Arab city who rushes toward the entrance of a new museum of modern and/or contemporary art only to find himself stopped in his tracks, frozen in place by the sense that should he proceed, he would “hit a wall.”

Showcasing institutional carapaces generally occluded in the production of aesthetic or historical value, the frame functions in *Scratching . . .* as a hieroglyph for the staging not only of display but of practices of viewing and consuming. Its role in this ambivalent parsing of institutional productivity recalls Jacques Derrida's characterization of the role played by the *parergon*, the supplement that in Kant's aesthetics remains (at least in theory) exterior to the work: “The violence of framing proliferates. It confines the theory of aesthetics within a theory of the beautiful, the theory of the beautiful within a theory of taste, and the theory of taste within a theory of judgment.”⁹

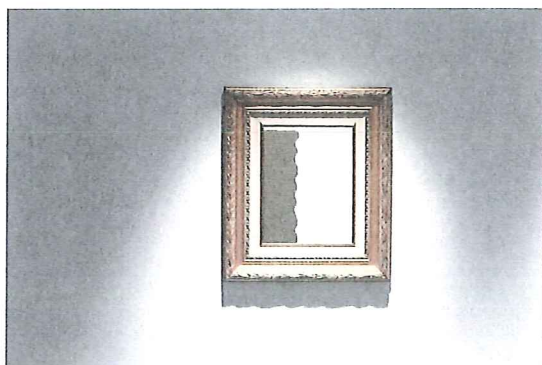
Little wonder, then, that like Kovalyov's nose, many of the works in *Scratching . . .* seek to break their bonds and take on a life of their own. In *Preface to the second edition* (2012; pp. 144–47), reflected images flicker as shadows cast upon the pristine floors of Mathaf. The museum's polished floor

is pressed into service as a primary medium for evanescent artworks whose alienated traces morph with the physical structure of their spaces of display. Conversely, in an exhibition of Islamic art from the collection of Doris Duke held at New York's Museum of Arts and Design in 2012, Raad supplied some of the captive objects caught in the glare of museum lights with shadows, anticipating the hope expressed in a text accompanying *Preface to the second edition* (p. 146) that the reflections captured in his images will eventually join the paintings in the museum, which currently lack them. By contrast, in *Preface to the seventh edition* (2012; fig. 4) these reflections and shadows take their place as prime objects, framed as canonical examples of Arab abstraction in a hypothetical Emirati museum. An accompanying text explains that eventually archival research divulges their true nature as paintings of a painting's shadow, at which point they lose their status as paradigms of Arab abstraction and are removed from view.

As this suggests, Raad is master of the *mise en abyme*, his work at once archly ludic and infused with the poignant ambivalence and absurdity of contingency as a condition of life (and death).¹⁰ The miniaturization of his past work, and of the gallery itself as work, in *Section 139: The Atlas Group* (1989–2004) (2008; pp. 128–31) evokes a nostalgia for craft, for careful practices of making, by no means irrelevant to Raad's own carefully constructed tableaux. The conceit underlying the work is the unexpected shrinkage of Raad's *Atlas Group* works to 1/100th of their actual size when displayed in a Beirut gallery;

in order to display the shrunken work, Raad constructed a white-cube gallery on the same scale. This model gallery housing tiny works constitutes a whole, which is displayed in gallery spaces that appear as macro-versions of its miniature spaces. Miniaturization through modeling provides privileged vistas into shrunken gallery spaces, engaging questions of exterior and interior that recall an observation of Susan Stewart's: "miniature time transcends the duration of everyday life in such a way as to create an interior temporality of the subject."¹¹ At a formal level, several commentators have connected Raad's gesture of miniaturization to canonical works of twentieth-century European art, invoking Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (1935–41; p. 42, fig. 18) and the miniature museums of Marcel Broodthaers, but given the nature of the *Scratching . . .* project, other histories may be equally relevant. Among the most enigmatic and compelling examples of medieval Islamic art, for example, are small-scale ceramic replicas of houses and mosques, their roofs raised to show interiors replete with human figures, furnishings, and even well-stocked tables (fig. 5).¹² Examples of these models can be found in most historical collections of Islamic art.

Similarly, Raad's penchant for micro-calligraphy recalls the miniature scale of amuletic or talismanic scripts. It may not be entirely serendipitous that to an observer familiar with Islamic art, the horizontal line of micro-calligraphy extending across the width of *Appendix XVIII: Plate 98_A History of Essays* (2009; p. 143) and other works in the *Appendix XVIII* series recalls



4 Walid Raad, *Preface to the seventh edition, III*, 2012. Pigmented inkjet print, 29 x 43 1/2" (73.7 x 110.5 cm)

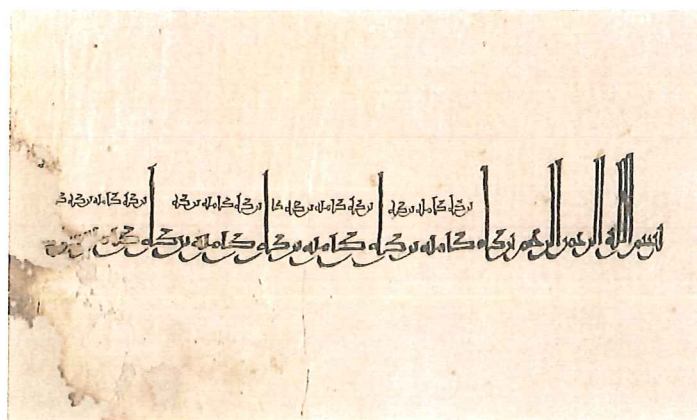


5 Model of a mosque with a preacher on a minbar. Iran, 12th–13th century. Molded, modeled, monochrome-glazed stone-paste, 2 3/4 x 7 1/4 x 4 1/2" (7 x 18.1 x 11.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund

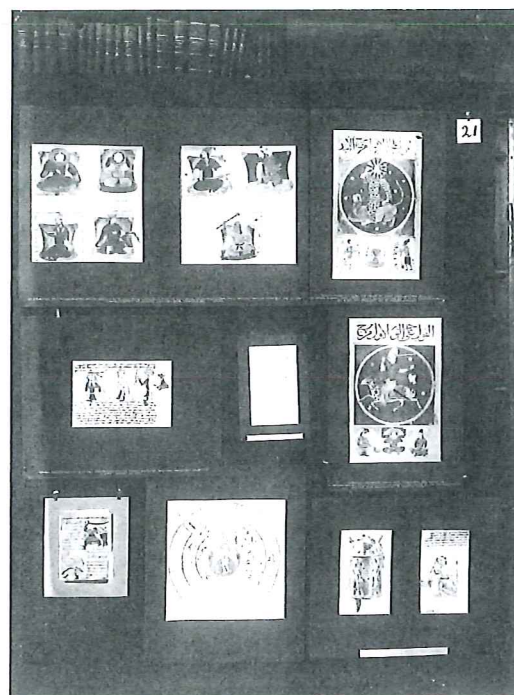
medieval *tiraz*, textiles inscribed with a linear band of Arabic script, often containing historical information (fig. 6). This is the case with *Appendix XVII*, where a partly miniaturized reproduction of the contents page from a 2002 issue of *Parachute* magazine dedicated to the art of Beirut is rotated through ninety degrees, so that variations in the lengths of the articles' titles register as verticals on a statistical bar chart.¹³ The texts of the *Parachute* issue include an essay on Raad's Atlas Group by the art historian Sarah Rogers. Also present are writings by celebrated Beirut-based artists with whom Raad has collaborated, including Akram Zaatari, whose recent work also engages with themes of archaeology and archives, and Walid Sadek, whose work Raad has addressed in his own. Sadek's *Love Is Blind*, an installation at Modern Art Oxford in 2006, comprised a group of framed captions and verbal descriptions of the landscape paintings of the Lebanese artist Mustafa Farroukh (1901–1957), images Sadek made accessible only through this textual narration; Raad's *On Walid Sadek's Love Is Blind* (Modern Art Oxford, 2006) (2008) restages that work as a trompe l'oeil painting after a photograph of the 2006 installation. The genealogy that Raad provides for this painterly recapitulation of a photograph of another artist's work in which images are mediated by texts explicitly invokes Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* of 1953, an icon of transformative appropriation.¹⁴ Less obviously, perhaps, the palimpsest qualities of the work recall the visual concatenations that produced the improbable objects of *Preface to the third edition*.

Comparisons have been made between Raad's overlays and practices of photomontage from Dada to Gerhard Richter, but the centrality of photography to his practice of morphing and layering is especially reminiscent of the work of Sherrie Levine (with whom he has exhibited). Levine's comments on her paintings after photographic reproductions of paintings in books (what she describes as "ghosts of ghosts") are worth quoting: "I wanted to make a picture which contradicted itself. I wanted to put a picture on top of a picture so that there are times when both pictures disappear and other times when they're both manifest; that vibration is basically what the work's about for me—that space in the middle where there's no picture."¹⁵ This quality of vibration, of hovering between manifestation and occlusion, captures the defining spirit of *Preface to the third edition*, and perhaps of *Scratching . . .* more generally.

In its allusive and anachronic telling of fragments and flotsam, layered to evoke conditions of living on and practices of reading back, Raad's work has been compared to that of the art historian Aby Warburg. Warburg's fabled *Mnemosyne Atlas*—left unfinished when he died, in 1929—was designed to showcase the afterlife and transformation of antique images and motifs, and consisted of constellations of images (including Islamic astrological paintings) brought into dialogue in a precocious analogue version of the hypertext (fig. 7).¹⁶ Similarly, in *Scratching . . .*, as in Raad's earlier work, memory and montage are mutually constituting. Proliferating visually striking hybrids, a work such as *Preface to the third edition* draws attention to



6 *Tiraz* (fragment), Iraq, 10th century. Linen and paint, 9 x 14" (22.9 x 35.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of George D. Pratt



7 Aby Warburg. *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, plate 21. October 1929. The Warburg Institute, London

the impure temporality of artworks, materializing their temporal stratifications and sedimentations through the medium of photomontage.¹⁷

The visual, even ontological indeterminacy effected through photomontage points to the epistemological uncertainties of the archive and of the object histories that it underwrites. Echoing Walter Benjamin's observations on the capacity of translation to create its original, Toufic argues that it is precisely practices of re-creation and repetition, such as Levine's, that prevent earlier works from appearing as counterfeits. In Toufic's terms, these are works that have not undergone an attempted resurrection, the idea being that artistic traditions can only become fully visible as tradition if constituted retrospectively. In an inversion that might serve as an epigram for Raad's earlier projects, which played with the authority of photography in their exploration of the Lebanese Civil War—one reason why the work has sometimes attracted criticism for undermining the very possibility of historical documentation—Toufic asserts that it is in fact the *impression* of being counterfeited that guarantees the reliability of the events that the work documents.¹⁸

In Raad's earlier work, even photodocumentation is pressed into a performance of instability and uncertainty, an oscillation between states of occlusion and visibility, inner and outer, that also permeates many of the works constituting *Scratching*. . . . This dialectical quality invokes a tension between exoteric and esoteric, form and essence, a dialectic with evident relevance to the notion of withdrawal and the messianic specter of

resurrection. Practices of re-creation, remaking, and repetition are integral to Raad's undertaking, engaging the peculiar temporality of withdrawal. The easy temporality implied by such titles as *Preface to the first edition* is at once belied by the doubled allusion to sequential time implied by "preface" and "first," a promise of progression consistently withheld from the reader/viewer of Raad's work, with its appendices, indices, prefaces, interrupted series, and marooned numerical sequences.

If attenuated or mediated access is one index of withdrawal, temporal instability is another. This is art history as augury enabled by time travel and telepathy: the portfolio that constitutes *Preface to the third edition* was purportedly made by a female artist working in 2026; in *Index XXVI: Red, blue, black, orange, yellow* (2010; pp. 132–37) Raad appears as both choreographer and medium, exhibiting the names of Lebanese painters working during the last century. The names appear as relief Arabic texts in white on white vinyl, their full visibility frustrated by the materials of inscription; a text accompanying *Index XXVI: Red, blue, black, orange, yellow* explains that these names have been transmitted telepathically from artists in the future (pp. 134–35). Of the work's dramatic corrections, crudely executed in colored, primarily red, paint (p. 137), the text explains that these telepathic artistic mediums have purposefully distorted the names' orthography, not to frustrate the writing of histories in the present but in the hope that the corrections necessitated by their errors will be made in colors immaterially withdrawn and unavailable to artists working in

the future. The artists from the future, like the vampires that feature in Toufic's work, will then seek to harvest this blood-red pigment from the present. Their mediated and opportunistic time-travel echoes the scavengings of contemporary art historians. Equally, the corrective policing of the contemporary canon necessitated by the orthographic distortions transmitted from the future performs an authority attenuated by the multiple mediations underlying it.

That artists from the future enable the writing of histories of art in the present (even if their activities are marked by an ambivalence emblematic of *Scratching . . .* itself) is one more indication of the way in which the project ranges blithely and refreshingly across temporal taxonomies. Once again, the impact of Toufic's work is palpable: integral to the temporal disruptions that follow traumatic events, Toufic suggests, is the fact that artists who were once avant-garde are merely of their time, any future-oriented aspects of their work the results of anachronistic collaboration with artists from the future. Similarly, Toufic suggests that the eschewal of tradition often associated with a certain rhetoric of modernism leads to a form of relativism that exaggerates its own absolutist (or universal) credentials. Consequently, "Only those who fully discerned the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster, tried to resurrect tradition, failed in doing so, may become truly absolutely modern."¹⁹ Such a scenario levels the distinctions between tradition and modernity, so that what might once have appeared traditional is revealed not to be so, while "many modernist

works of art which vehemently attacked 'tradition' are, prior to any reluctant gradual canonization, revealed by their withdrawal to be part of that tradition."²⁰

This question of temporality is directly related to the problematic of taxonomy engaged by *Scratching . . .*, and epitomized by ongoing debates about the value of such terms as "Modern Islamic Art" or "Contemporary Islamic Art."²¹ As *Scratching . . .* suggests, despite the rigid temporal taxonomies that ensure the disaggregation of the modern from the premodern and both from the contemporary, their institutional presentation has more in common than first appears. When The Metropolitan Museum of Art's galleries of Islamic art were reinstalled in 2011, for example, they were renamed as the galleries showcasing the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia. That choice was mirrored in Doha's Mathaf, the Arab Museum of Modern Art, which had opened one year earlier. Both represent a move away from the universalist aspirations or pretensions of encyclopedic museums and toward ethnically or regionally based presentations reminiscent of earlier taxonomies. Similar tensions permeate the creation of regional franchises of national museums in the Gulf in order to promote access to a cultural heritage presented in universalist terms.

In terms of Islamic art, these developments raise significant questions about the politics of representation: about whether and how the art of vast regions extending from the Atlantic to the Tigris and beyond can be adequately represented in and by one center, and about what is at stake in the authority and economic

or infrastructural capacity to represent.²² In the case of the Gulf museums, the “homecoming” of Arab or Islamic art—ranging from ceramics, metalwork, and miniature paintings to large-scale canvases and sculptures—is an aspect and effect of contemporary geopolitics that highlights the utility of art in regional constructions of transregional identity and heritage. Tensions between pan-Arabism and nationalism or regionalism seem to suffuse some of the work in *Scratching . . .*, appearing, for example, as a disjunction between title and inscription in plates 88–90 of *Appendix XVIII*, in which each “plate” has its own, universal title (. . . *A History of Art*, . . . *A History of Museums* [p. 140], . . . *A History of Exhibitions*) at odds with the Arabic micro-texts that it bears, which signal a more specifically Lebanese orientation.

In keeping with all of Raad's earlier work, *Scratching . . .* eschews any shrill ideological position in favor of a politics of poetics. The project is nonetheless deeply implicated by questions about the possibilities and problematics of representation, questions arising from current economies of cultural production. Integral to one of the works within *Appendix XVIII* are costings—rough calculations, dollar amounts, figures and lists of beverages (for a gallery opening?) articulated around the words “Beirut” and “Cairo,” foregrounding interrelations between economic and cultural capital, between the production of value and the means of production, the visibility of art and its sustaining infrastructures. *Translator's introduction: Pension arts in Dubai* (2012; pp. 114–21) unravels the global networks underpinning an unlikely investment fund for artists, laying bare

the imbrications between global capital, information technology, and the Israeli military. Ultimately these global connections relate the objects of art to the bodies that shape and consume them, including those exploited in the construction of pristine architectural frames for the promotion of cultural values. Raad's involvement with Gulf Labor, a coalition of international artists working to protect migrant workers' rights during the construction and maintenance of foreign museums and universities in Abu Dhabi, makes the matter more than academic.

Collaborative endeavors between secular humanism and enlightened despotism to develop cultural infrastructures dependent on the predations of bonded labor throw into high relief the Janus-faced principles that permeate histories of the modern museum, histories and principles central to *Scratching on things I could disavow*. Such collaborations constitute a cosmopolitan coalition of the willing, a cultural coming-of-age that finds its mirror image in a recent widely circulated photograph of the United Arab Emirates' first female pilot heading north to join American, Arab, and European aircraft dropping high-tech bombs on Syria (fig. 8). Which will be the face of the future remains to be seen. What the play with fragments, frames, taxonomies, and temporalities that constitutes *Scratching on things I could disavow* suggests is that collusions and occlusions integral to the construction of archives, histories, and cultural infrastructures in general are necessarily marked by what one critic of the newly installed Louvre Islamic galleries described as “the occultation of ambiguities.”²³



8 Mariam al-Mansouri, the first Emirati female fighter jet pilot. Video still from CNN broadcast, September 2014

- 1 For a review of some of these developments, albeit omitting some of the more critical voices, see Benoît Junod, Georges Khalil, Stefan Weber, and Gerhard Wolf, eds., *Islamic Art and the Museum: Approaches to Art and Archaeology of the Muslim World in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Saqi, 2012). See also the essays on collecting and the historiography of the field of Islamic art history in *Ars Orientalis* no. 30 (2000) and the *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 6 (June 2012).
- 2 Perhaps the most idiosyncratic articulation of this well-established idea appears in Eustache de Lorey, "Picasso et l'Orient musulman," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 6 per., t. 8 (1932):299–314. More recent (and orthodox) articulations include Markus Brüderlin, *Ornament and Abstraction: The Dialogue between Non-Western, Modern and Contemporary Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).
- 3 See my essay "From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art," in Elizabeth C. Mansfield, ed., *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 31–53. The practices of temporal alienation and stratification are directly related to the politics of display, underwriting the narratives of civilizational decline or fall that the rhetoric around Islamic art objects often promotes.
- 4 Jalal Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster*, 2009, available online at www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads/Jalal_Toufic_The_Withdrawal_of_Tradition_Past_a_Surpassing_Disaster.pdf (accessed February 21, 2015). A print copy of this text was included with Walid Raad's exhibition catalogue *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Arab World/Part I, Volume 1, Chapter 1* (Beirut: 1992–2005), ed. Clara Kim (Los Angeles: California Institute of the Arts/REDCAT, 2009). For Raad's introduction to his *Scratching* project see his website: <http://www.scratchingonthings.com/> (accessed March 12, 2015).
- 5 Ibid., pp. 59–60.
- 6 Suggestively in terms of *Scratching* . . . , Toufic imagines that, in the space of the gallery or museum, proximity to any index of immaterial withdrawal will affect the artifacts or images on display with blurring, a lack of sharpness or crispness. Ibid., pp. 66–67.
- 7 On the supposed indexicality of the photograph, however, see Peter Geimer, "Image as Trace: Speculations about an Undead Paradigm," in *differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007):7–28.
- 8 Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition*, pp. 58–59. The missing Gardner paintings have been the subject of two projects by the French artist Sophie Calle, which combined texts and photographs to explore questions of absence and memory. In 2013, Calle's work was displayed in the Gardner Museum itself; see http://www.gardnermuseum.org/contemporary_art/exhibitions/past_exhibitions/sophie_calle_last_seen?filter=exhibitions:5438 (accessed March 12, 2015).
- 9 Jacques Derrida, "The Parergon," trans. Craig Owens, *October* no. 9 (Summer 1979):30.
- 10 In this as in its engagement with the archive and the museum, some of Raad's work recalls that of Barbara Bloom. See Dave Hickey, Susan Tallman, and Bloom, *The Collections of Barbara Bloom* (Göttingen: Steidl, and New York: International Center of Photography, 2008).
- 11 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 66.
- 12 See Margaret S. Graves, "Ceramic House Models from Medieval Persia: Domestic Architecture and Concealed Activities," *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* no. 46 (2008):227–51.
- 13 *Parachute* no. 108 (2002).
- 14 See www.sfeir-semmler.com/beirut/exhibitions-beirut/2008/2008-10-07-walid-raad.html. On *Erased de Kooning Drawing* see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum* 21, no. 1 (September 1982):43–56.
- 15 Sherrie Levine, quoted in Jeanne Siegel, "After Sherrie Levine," in Sally Everett, ed., *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-Garde, Contextualist and Post-Modernist Thought* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 1995), p. 266.
- 16 Aby Warburg, *L'Atlas Mnémosyne* (Paris: L'écarquillé, 2012).
- 17 See Georges Didi-Huberman, "Before the Image, before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism," trans. Peter Mason, in Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg, eds., *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and out of History* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 31–44.
- 18 Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition*, pp. 26–27, 56. See also Bruno Latour and Adam Lowe, "The Migration of the Aura or How to Explore the Original through its Facsimiles," in Thomas Bartscherer and Roderick Coover, eds., *Switching Codes: Thinking Through Digital Technology in the Humanities and the Arts* (Chicago: at the University Press, 2011), pp. 275–98. Relevant earlier projects of Raad's include *My neck is thinner than a hair: Engines* (1996–2001) and *Let's be honest, the weather helped I* (1998/2006).
- 19 Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition*, p. 34.
- 20 Ibid., p. 64.
- 21 See Flood, "From the Prophet to Postmodernism."
- 22 A case in point is the Bahrain pavilion at the Venice Biennale's 14th International Architecture Exhibition in 2014. Entitled *Fundamentalists and Other Arab Modernisms*, the pavilion presented a pan-Arab history of modernist architecture at a moment when the Bahraini government, with the help of Saudi Arabia, was brutally suppressing its own Shi'i Arab population.
- 23 Rémi Labrusse, "Des arts de l'Islam au Louvre et de quelques ambiguïtés," *La Croix*, November 19, 2012, available online at www.la-croix.com/Archives/2012-11-19/OPINION-Des-arts-de-l-Islam-au-Louvre-et-de-quelques-ambiguites-Remi-Labrusse-professeur-d-histoire-de-l-art-a-l-universite-Paris-Ouest-la-Defense-_NP_-2012-11-19-877835 (accessed February 23, 2015).