

with cabinets of wonder and the use of old-fashioned display cases on the part of contemporary artists such as Mark Dion may also make Broodthaers's forays in that direction appear less remarkable. Yet his wit and inventiveness retain a contemporary feel, as in the plastic plaques that are among his most original creations (1968–69; pp.162–63, 171, 233–35 and 344).

After the museum projects, Broodthaers turned to what he called *Décors*, exhibitions that combined old works with new ones in settings that were sometimes used as film sets (one meaning of the term in French). One of these installations, *Décor: A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers* (originally installed at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1975; Michael Werner Gallery, New York and London; pp.322–23 and p.334), is an exercise in deadpan satire that focuses on the Battle of Waterloo, another Belgian claim to fame. Broodthaers said the work was about the relationship between war and comfort, and its nineteenth-century room features two antique canons, silver candelabra and a stuffed snake, while the twentieth-century room includes modern automatic rifles as well as an outdoor table-and-chair set, complete with a Battle of Waterloo jigsaw puzzle in progress. In a short film (*Un voyage à Waterloo (Napoléon 1769–1969)*, 1969; pp.181 and 347), Broodthaers recorded his own pilgrimage to the battlefield: at one point he appears wearing a fake nose, sitting on a crate in the car park with tour buses in the background.

Most impressive of all the *Décor* productions may be *La Salle blanche (The white room)* (1975; p.326; Fig.68), a full-scale reproduction of part of Broodthaers's apartment-studio-gallery-museum space. It presents a Magritte-like play with language, using words such as 'composition', 'images', 'portrait', 'sun' and 'figure' to conjure up a dreamlike poetic discourse on nature and art.

We can only wonder what Broodthaers would make of the present age, when museums are global franchises, artists such as Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst suggest marketing skill is the essential artistic talent, and innumerable biennials and art fairs cater to the collectogarchy. Broodthaers's unwavering concern with 'the transformation of art into merchandise' now appears all the more prescient, and his provocative attitude all the more welcome.

¹ The exhibition will travel to **Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid** (4th October 2016 to 9th January 2017) and **Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf** (4th March to 11th June 2017). Catalogue: *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective*. Edited by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix, with contributions by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Cathleen Chaffee, Jean-François Chevrier *et al.* 352 pp. incl. 450 col. ills. (Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2016), \$75. ISBN: 978-0-87070-962-3.

Walid Raad

New York, Boston and Mexico City

by MARTHA BUSKIRK

IN VERY BASIC ways, Walid Raad (b.1967) has deliberately and successfully thwarted key museum conventions. His retrospective, which opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and is currently on view at the **Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston** (to 30th May), before travelling to the Museo Jumex, Mexico City (13th October–14th January), presents two bodies of work, neither of which yields its secrets without sustained attention to supplementary information. The first, from 1989–2004, consists of purportedly archival material from Lebanon's 1975–91 Civil War offered under the umbrella of Raad's fictional artists' collective, the Atlas Group. The second, begun in 2007 and ongoing, is *Scratching on things I could disavow*, a series of responses to fast-paced museum and related institutional development in the Arab world, arrayed within a multimedia installation that also functions much like a stage set.

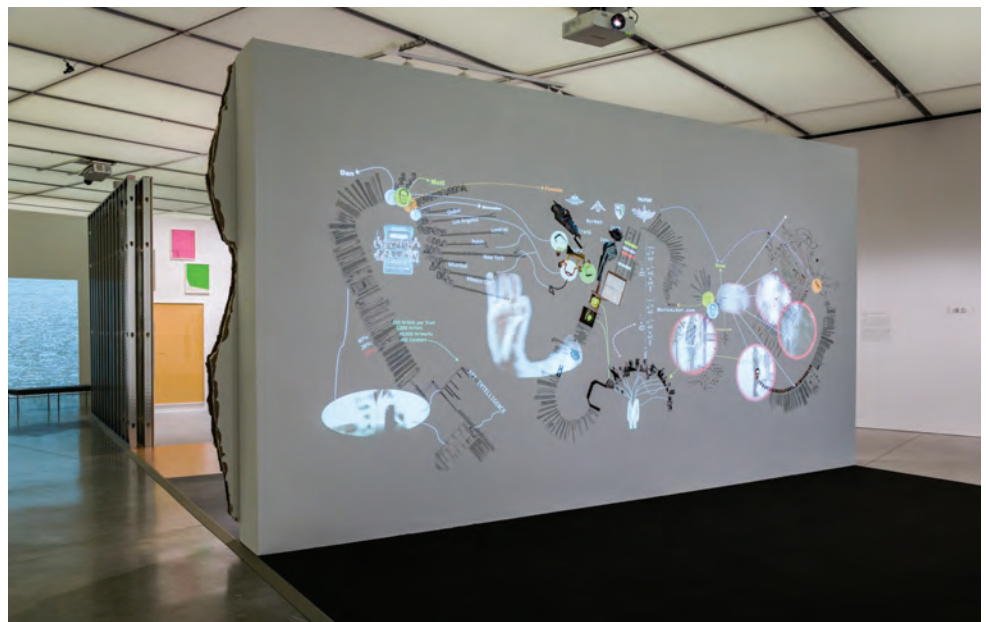
With its deft interweaving of fact and fantasy, encompassing found material, fictive authorship and a web-based archive, Raad's Atlas Group quickly garnered attention for its implied critique of how source documents, particularly photographs, are incorporated into historical narratives. In this respect his extrapolations are reminiscent of other museum fictions, including the much-discussed Museum of Jurassic Technology, Los Angeles.¹ But it is important to remember that what Raad describes as 'hysterical documents' emanate from his very real experience of Lebanon's descent into violence.²

One generally expects to consult a wall label for supplementary information. Here,

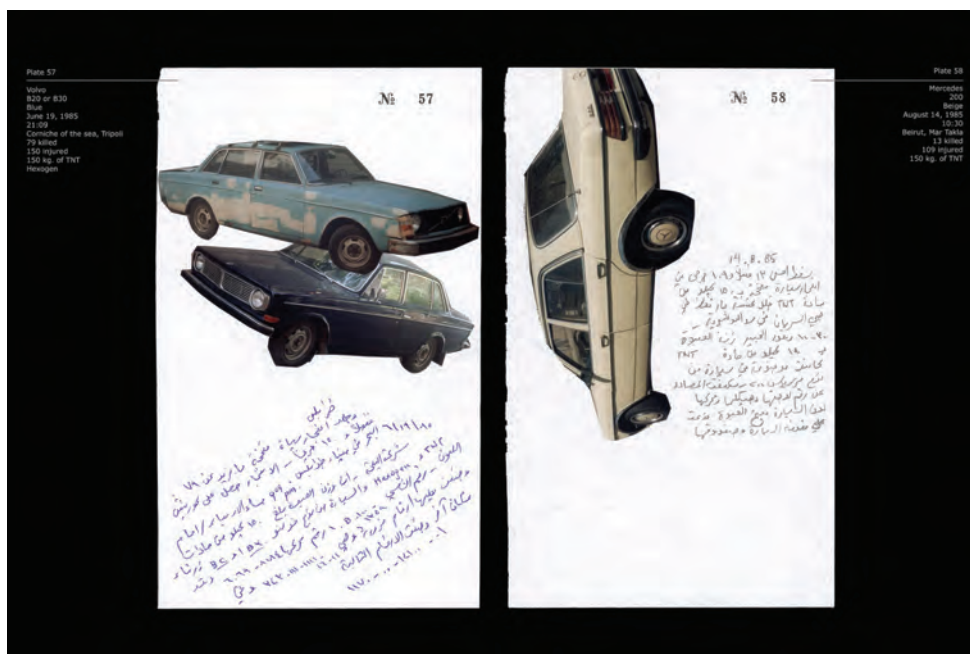
however, they provide Raad's fictional framing and are thus an integral part of the work. Eva Respini, the exhibition's curator, uses her introductory wall text (distinguished by a different background paint colour) to clue viewers into this misdirection, referring to 'a complex composite truth stretching beyond historical fact', in the context of 'imaginary narratives'. But a full understanding of the work requires sources that lie beyond the physical exhibition.

Secrets in the open sea (1994/2004; Helga de Alvear Foundation, Cáceres), a series of 175 cm-wide pigmented inkjet prints, appears at first glance to consist of nothing but blue monochromes – until one notices diminutive black-and-white photographs in the lower-right corner of each. According to the wall label, six out of a cache of twenty-nine entirely blue photographic prints found in the rubble of a destroyed building in Beirut were sent to labs in France and Britain, which recovered small black-and-white latent images containing portraits identified by members of the Atlas Group as 'individuals who had drowned, died, or were found dead in the Mediterranean between 1975 and 1991'.³ The prints would be radically incomplete without this textual overlay. But one has to go further afield, to Respini's catalogue essay, to find out that these photographs are in fact innocuous newspaper images of corporate or social functions.⁴ It is also necessary to consult the small print in the catalogue checklist to clarify Raad's dates, with their purported moment of origin and year of production divided by a slash indicating the retrospective nature of his operation.

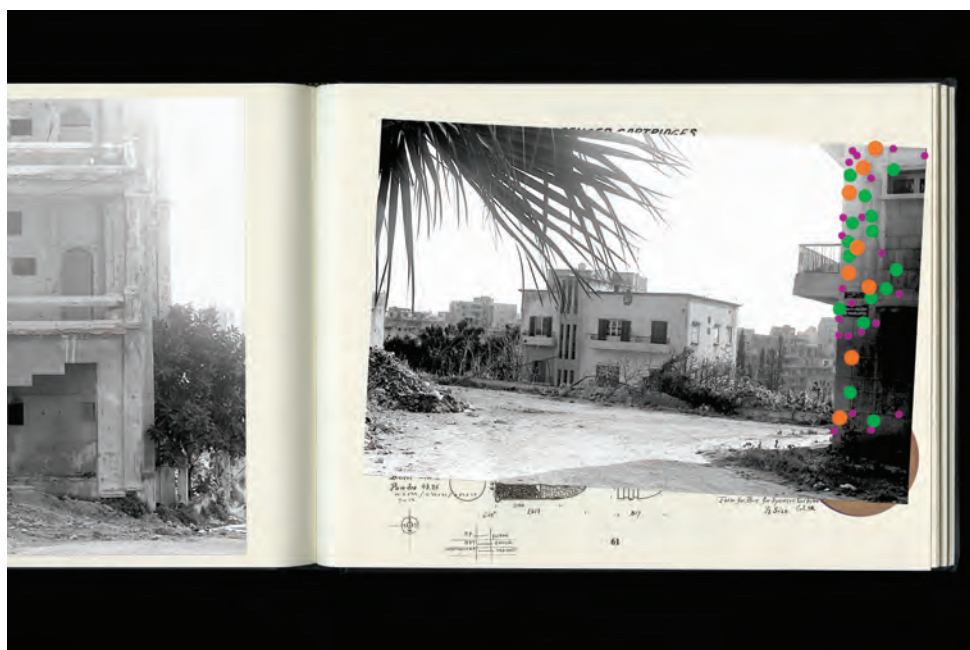
One of the more sustained fictions of the Atlas Group is Dr Fadl Fakhouri, whose notebooks were reportedly donated to the group's archive after his death. Pages from notebook 38 combine cut-out photographs of cars corresponding to makes and models



72. *Translator's introduction: Pension arts in Dubai*, by Walid Raad. 2012. Paper cutouts on wall with two-channel video, 350 by 700 cm. (Paula Cooper Gallery, New York; exh. Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston).



73. Notebook volume 38: *already been in a lake of fire*, plates 57–58, by the Atlas Group/Walid Raad. 1991/2003. Pigmented inkjet print, 30 by 41.9 cm. (Paula Cooper Gallery, New York; exh. Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston).



74. *Let's be honest, the weather helped, Saudi Arabia*, by the Atlas Group/Walid Raad. 1998/2006. Pigmented inkjet print, 46.8 by 72.4 cm. (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; exh. Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston).

of those used as bombs, with hand-written records of date, place and casualty numbers (Fig.73). These are closely paralleled by another set of photographs attributed to Atlas Group research into archival newspaper records documenting mangled engines associated with car bombs, and amplified by a third group of photographs (described as photos taken by Raad and given to the Atlas Group), of bullet- and shrapnel-damaged buildings that have been altered by the addition of colourful dots (Fig.74). Raad's claim to have detailed notes and photographs recording the buildings from which he extracted the bullets that he collected as a child does not appear plausible.

But there is no reason to doubt the collecting activity itself – a sadly common diversion for children in areas ravaged by both war and urban gang violence – or Raad's secondary point, his later realisation that ammunition's colour-coding can be traced back to the multiple countries that supplied Lebanon's rival factions.

Scratching on things I could disavow shifts its attention from past conflict to present uses of art throughout the Middle East. Here the physical installations function as backdrops and are essentially incomplete without a different form of supplementary text – Raad's performance of his Walkthrough (accessible,

to a degree, for those not able to catch one of his many live appearances, via audio to which one can listen on a mobile device).⁵

In the first part of *Walkthrough*, "Translator's introduction: Pension arts in Dubai" (2012; Fig.72), Raad describes extensive research following an invitation to join the Dubai section of the Artists' Pension Trust. It is difficult to tell where his elaborate and somewhat paranoid narrative slips from fact to fantasy, given that the chairman and co-founder of the fund, Moti Shniberg, does indeed seem to have extensive Israeli military as well as data mining experience (deriving his fortune from selling a facial-recognition startup to Facebook) and to have filed paperwork to trademark the date 'September 11, 2001' that very afternoon.

The subsequent narratives (with corresponding props) are increasingly bizarre: an artist attending a museum opening in an Arab city finds himself mysteriously incapable of proceeding through the entrance; the entire Atlas Group project is unaccountably miniaturised to 1/100 scale; via faulty telepathy from the future, Raad has received the names of Lebanese artists from the past century, a narrative that then blends into a story about an artist who inexplicably loses access to the colour red; and finally, a frenetic discourse on the effect of war on colours, shapes and forms that have responded defensively to conflict by hiding or camouflaging themselves. Fantastic? Perhaps, but 'Section 88_ACT XXXI' (the impassable doorway) and 'Index XXVI: Red, blue, black, orange, yellow' (on the future inaccessibility of colour) both date to 2010. In 2014 there was a proposal to ban the use of cadmium pigments in the European Union, and in 2015 Raad was denied entry into the United Arab Emirates because of his role in the activist group Gulf Labor. In both sections of his retrospective, Raad's fictional extrapolations circle back in surprising ways to reveal darker truths.

¹ The Museum of Jurassic Technology was founded by David Hildebrand Wilson and Diana Drake Wilson in 1988. For an overview of the interweaving of fact and fiction in its displays, see Lawrence Weschler: *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, And Other Marvels of Jurassic Technology*, New York 1995.

² Raad emigrated from Lebanon to the United States in 1983 to escape the violence in Lebanon; see, for example, A. Gilbert: 'Walid Raad' (interview), *Bomb Magazine* 81 (Fall 2002), pp.38–45.

³ Wall text, which also appears on the Atlas Group website (<http://www.theatlasgroup.org/data/TypeFD.html>; accessed 18th March 2016) and on p.70 of the catalogue: *Walid Raad*. Edited by Eva Respini, with a contribution by Walid Raad and an essay by Finbarr Barry Flood. 192 pp. incl. 200 col. ills. (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2015), \$55. ISBN 978-0-87070-973-9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.38.

⁵ The audio files can be accessed at http://www.moma.org/m/tours/46/tour_stops?locale=en (accessed 18th March 2016). A transcript of the first section was published as Walid Raad, 'Walkthrough, Part I', *e-flux journal* 48, 10 (2013), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/walkthrough-part-i/> (accessed 18th March 2016), and the entire transcript, in English, French, Italian and Arabic, is included in D. McCorquodale: *Walid Raad. Walkthrough*, London 2013.