

Meet the Artist Blending Fact and Fiction in Lebanese History

Throughout the 48-year-old artist's quarter-century career, [Walid Raad](#) has always been a provocateur. He once commissioned a painter [to recreate another artist's installation as a painting](#) when the installation artist denied Walid's request to use his work for his own exhibition. In his installation [Index XXVI: Blue and Green and Yellow and Red and Orange](#), the artist asserts to his viewers that he created the crumbling wall work in response to "artists from the future sending me their names via telepathy."

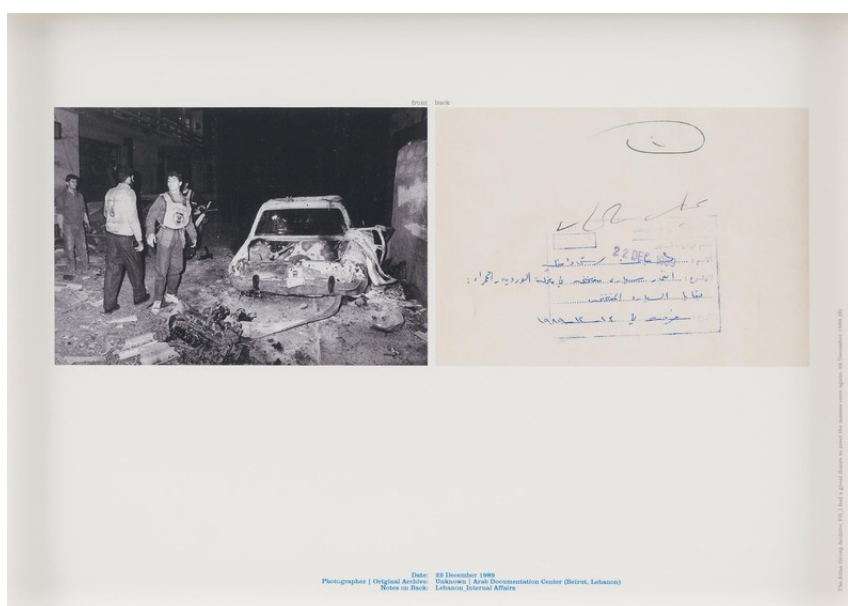
The Lebanese born, New York based artist is currently having [the first American survey of his work at MoMA](#), highlighting in particular two pivotal projects of the artist's 25 year career, *The Atlas Group* (1989-2004) and *Scratching on things I could disavow* (2007-ongoing). With the tumultuous history of Lebanon in his veins and in his childhood past, Walid is often political but never preachy, instead finding alternative approaches to bring the viewer into contemporary Gulf history.



Installation view of Walid Raad, The Museum of Modern Art, October 12, 2015-January 31, 2016

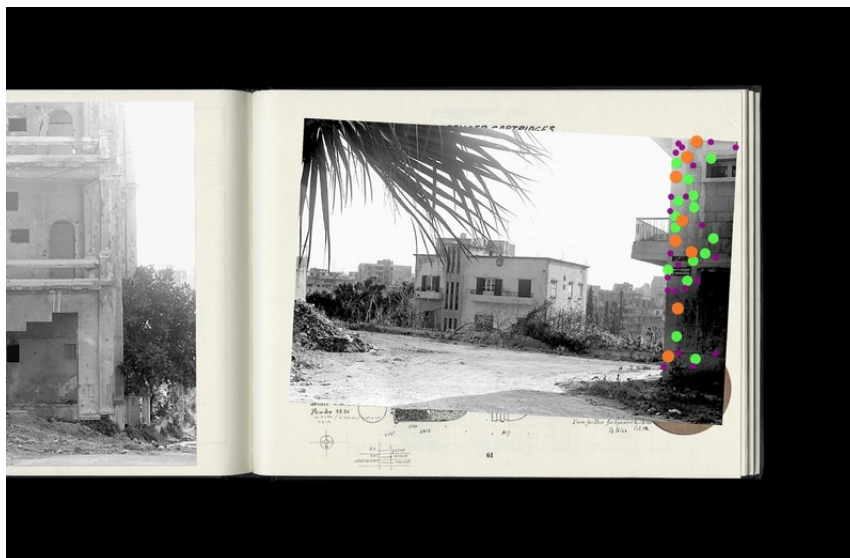
© 2015 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Thomas Griesel

[The Atlas Group](#) is perhaps his most iconic series, consisting of a fictitious organization founded by Walid that is seemingly concerned with the preservation of contemporary Lebanese history. Through photographs, texts, and videos, often presented in the form of a comprehensive lecture, Walid creates incredibly believable narratives relating to Lebanon's war-torn recent history. For those who've never visited the country, it becomes nearly impossible to realize the sleight-of-hand he conducts; Nothing is as it seems.



The Atlas Group/ Walid Raad. My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair: Engines (detail). 1996-2004. One hundred pigmented inkjet prints, 9 7/16 x 13 3/8" (24 x 34 cm) each. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fund for the Twenty-First Century. © 2015 Walid Raad

Part of this effect lies in the origins of Walid's source material. The artist does not usually stage the images, videos, and interviews; instead they come from real Lebanese news clippings and press photographs, as well as through the artist's own observant street photography.



THE ATLAS GROUP/ WALID RAAD (Lebanese, born 1967). *Let's be honest, the weather helped Saudi Arabia*. 1998/2006. Pigmented inkjet print. Image: 18 7/16 x 28 1/2" (46.8 x 72.4 cm). Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. T.B. Walker Acquisition Fund

The re-contextualization and altering of the elements within the presented media is how Raad is ultimately able to trick the viewer. *Let's be honest, the weather helped*, a series by Atlas Group, shows images of shelled buildings in Beirut covered in John Baldessari-esque colorful dots, claiming to represent where bullets hit the building and whose different colors are supposedly indicative of the type of bullet found. Statements by Raad and other unverifiable sources are all that separate us from a complete fictionalization of the image. Walid proves how easily history can be rewritten and obscured thanks to our tendency to take historical documents as fact.



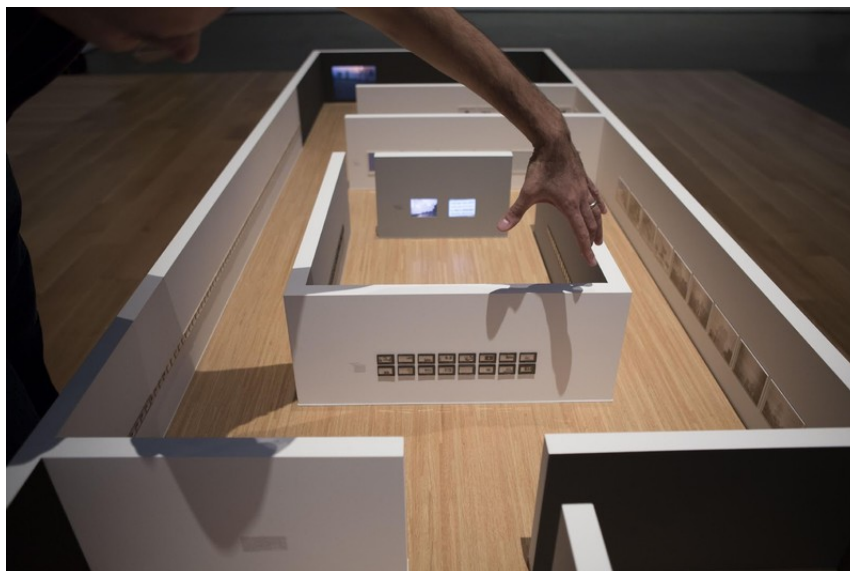
Walid Raad. *Scratching on things I could disavow*: Walkthrough. 2015. Part of Walid Raad, *The Museum of Modern Art*, October 12, 2015–January 31, 2016. © 2015 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Julieta Cervantes

[*Scratching on things I could disavow*](#) is a more recent series by Walid Raad that is still being unveiled. Rather than the politics of Lebanese wars, this project deals with the art world and art market's sudden emergence and infiltration throughout the Gulf region.



Walid Raad. *Section 88: Views from outer to inner compartments*. 2010. Single-channel HD video (color, silent), 14:36 min. Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. © 2015 Walid Raad

Some of the works within the series share the fictionalized approach used in *The Atlas Group*. *Views from Inner to Outer Compartments* bases itself on the story of a man scared to walk into a museum in an unnamed Arab city in "fear of running into a wall" who is then arrested and labeled as demented, an event Walid prophetically asserts will happen "before 2024" and will "certainly be in the newspaper."



Walid Raad. *Scratching on things I could disavow: Walkthrough*. 2015. Part of Walid Raad, *The Museum of Modern Art*, October 12, 2015–January 31, 2016. © 2015 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Julieta Cervantes

Section 139, another part of this series, consists of a miniature-sized gallery exhibition consisting of very small works from *The Atlas Group* series. In the mid 2000s, Walid was approached for an exhibition for four consecutive years by Beirut's first white cube-style art gallery. After finally agreeing to do participate, Walid was shocked to see they had printed his work at 1/100th scale, either as a practical joke or an incredible error of judgment. Taking advantage of a situation presented before you as any artist should, Walid created a small white cube to show his work at the correct proportions, highlighting both the absurdity of the Lebanese gallery and changing the way to approach his older work.



Walid Raad. *Scratching on things I could disavow: Walkthrough*. 2015. Part of Walid Raad, *The Museum of Modern Art*, October 12, 2015–January 31, 2016. © 2015 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Julieta Cervantes

Be sure to catch the survey of [Walid Raad's intermixing of historical fact, fiction, and trickery](#) at MoMA until January 31st, 2016.

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