

Preface to the First Edition

Lebanese artist Walid Raad brings to the Louvre a continuum of semi-abstract relationships: a splendid line in which the contours of the museum's spaces and a video showing objects and texts interact in a Minimalist design of disarming beauty.

[Ivo Bonacorsi](#)



Lebanese artist Walid Raad brings his [Preface to the First Edition](#) to the Louvre, adding another chapter to the research commenced with his [Scratching on Things I Could Disavow](#) project, exploring the relationship between contemporary times and certain new constructions being built in the Arab world. In *Scratching...*, Raad introduced doubts and subtle aporias, undermining stereotypes and highlighting attitudes and

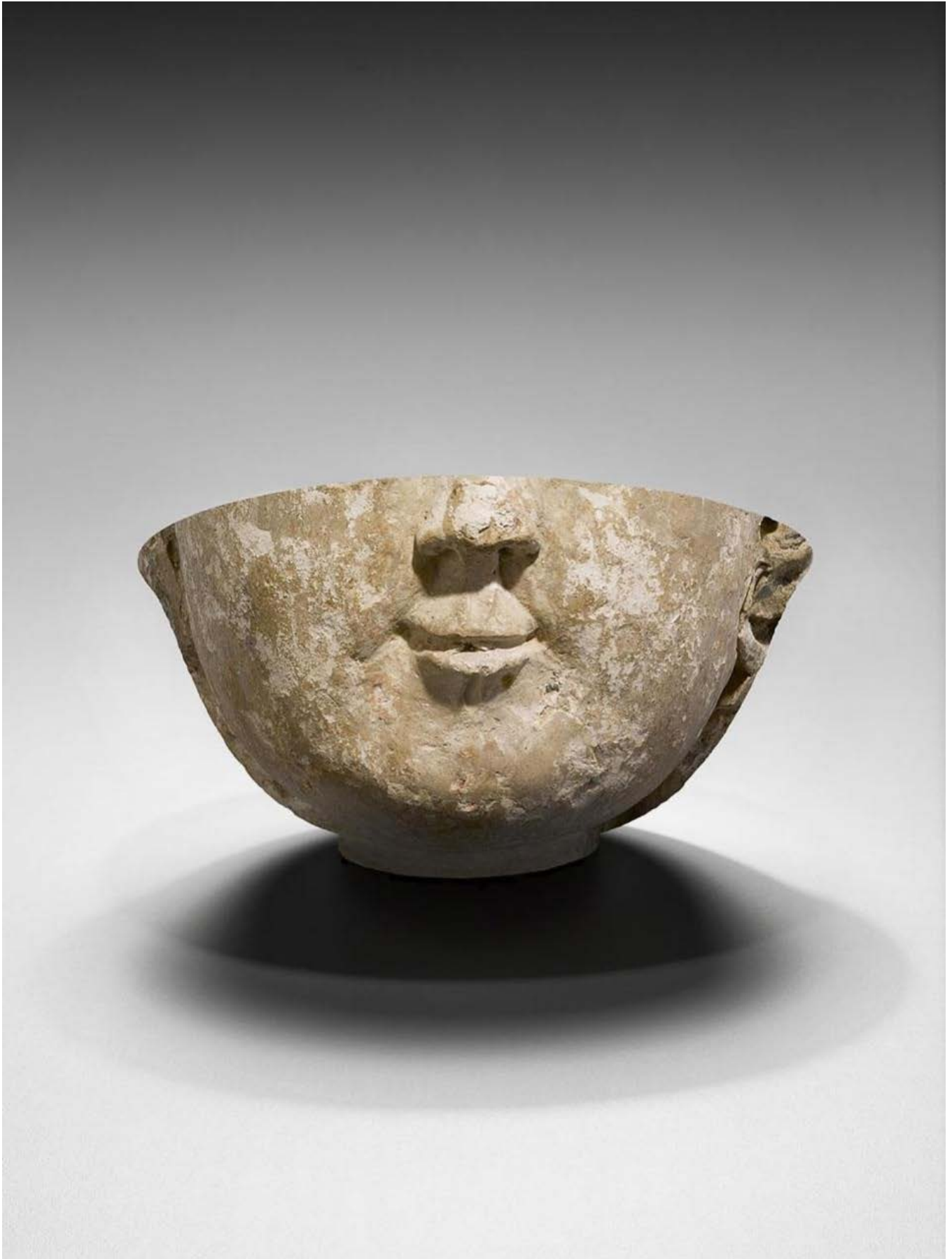
metaphors in these countries' geo-political fabric that speak directly to the public.

The means may be on par with the aesthetic languages behind the massive financial and cultural investments currently seen in the Arab world, but exaggerated emphasis is being given to the exploits of global capital at work in the sector. The huge possibilities that appear to present themselves seem confined to a cultural nonsense that is seeking exotic destinations and linking utopia to a fanciful framework, with a leap in epistemological scale that deserves analysis. Walid Raad seems to suggest that — much to our surprise and lulled by a blessed sense of inadequacy — we are witnessing previously unseen operations of historicisation and cultural consumption, almost as if we lacked the means to grasp a concrete understanding of their epoch-making significance. The Lebanese artist skilfully asks us to perform an exercise of simulation, successfully drawing spectators into his own direct confrontation with cultural politics. We should not forget that Raad was a [signatory of the boycott](#) of the [Guggenheim Abu Dhabi](#).



Top and above: *Walid Raad/Préface à la première édition* installation view at the Musée du Louvre. Photo by Antoine Mongodin

The Louvre is the museum responsible for launching an outpost-gamble on a [disused mining site in Lens](#), as well as an Abu Dhabi branch designed by Jean Nouvel, which is currently nearing completion on Saadiyat Island. It is, therefore, truly courageous of Marcella Lista, in charge of the museum's contemporary activities, to organise an exhibition as politically important and difficult as this one — as you will realise if you read the comments made on the French institution's website. The Salle de la Maquette in the Sully Wing hosts a new installation that intentionally feels stripped back to the bone. With his architectural and seemingly floating vision of this fine concrete construction, Walid Raad has created something more than a fragmentary sign.



Walid Raad, *Préface à la troisième édition: Coupe II*, 2013. Variable dimensions. © Walid Raad. With thanks to Hughes Dubois

The hordes of tourists rushing to the Egyptian section do not even notice this continuum of semi-abstract relationships — a splendid line in which the contours of the museum's spaces and a video showing objects and texts interact in a Minimalist design of disarming beauty. This space is based on and stems from the Lebanese artist's focus on the theories of writer and filmmaker [Jalal Toufic](#). The impact of the disasters and succession of calamities spawned by the constant wars, especially those causing bloodshed in the Arab world, extends to the whole world. Art and its objects end up being changed far more than just materially and psychologically. There are no captivating images, but a sense of disintegration, in a video showing hybrid exhibits of great museum value that blur into one another.

Walid Raad is convinced that even the selection, sample and loan of a small number (28 objects in all) of the 18,000 pieces from the Department of Islamic Art to the new Louvre in Abu Dhabi will trigger a strong sense of estrangement



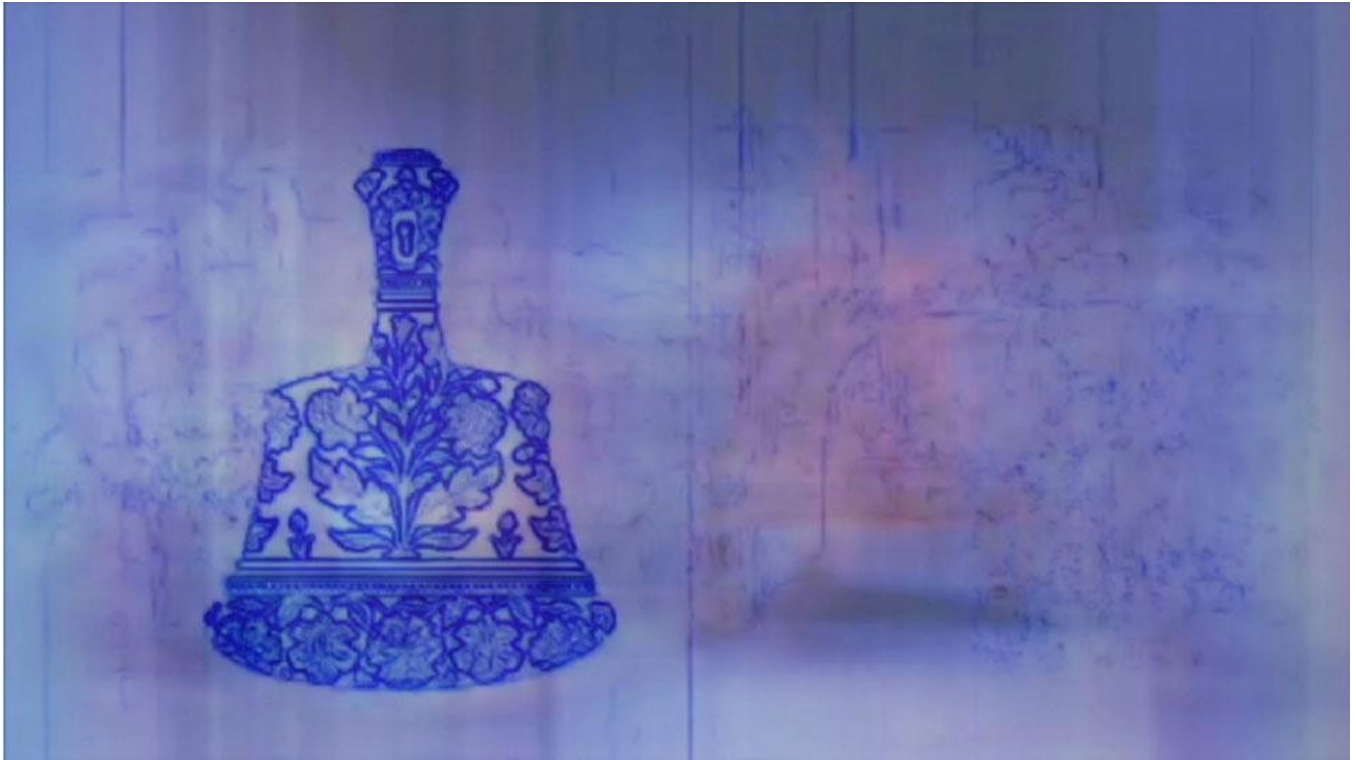
Walid Raad/Préface à la première édition installation view at the Musée du Louvre. Photo by Antoine Mongodin

The artist shifts us conceptually forward in time, to the opening dates of what is already being imagined as a media event, its primary artistic and cultural nature overlooked. Walid Raad tries to focus on this actual change that occurs in the objects. Although the opening of the Louvre outpost in Abu Dhabi is the crux of this exhibition, the artist latches onto its function as a practical and coercive institution of contemporary museography. Like the activist he is, he explores the all-absorbing policies of the technical procedures, the archives and selection, which are neither neutral nor innocent.



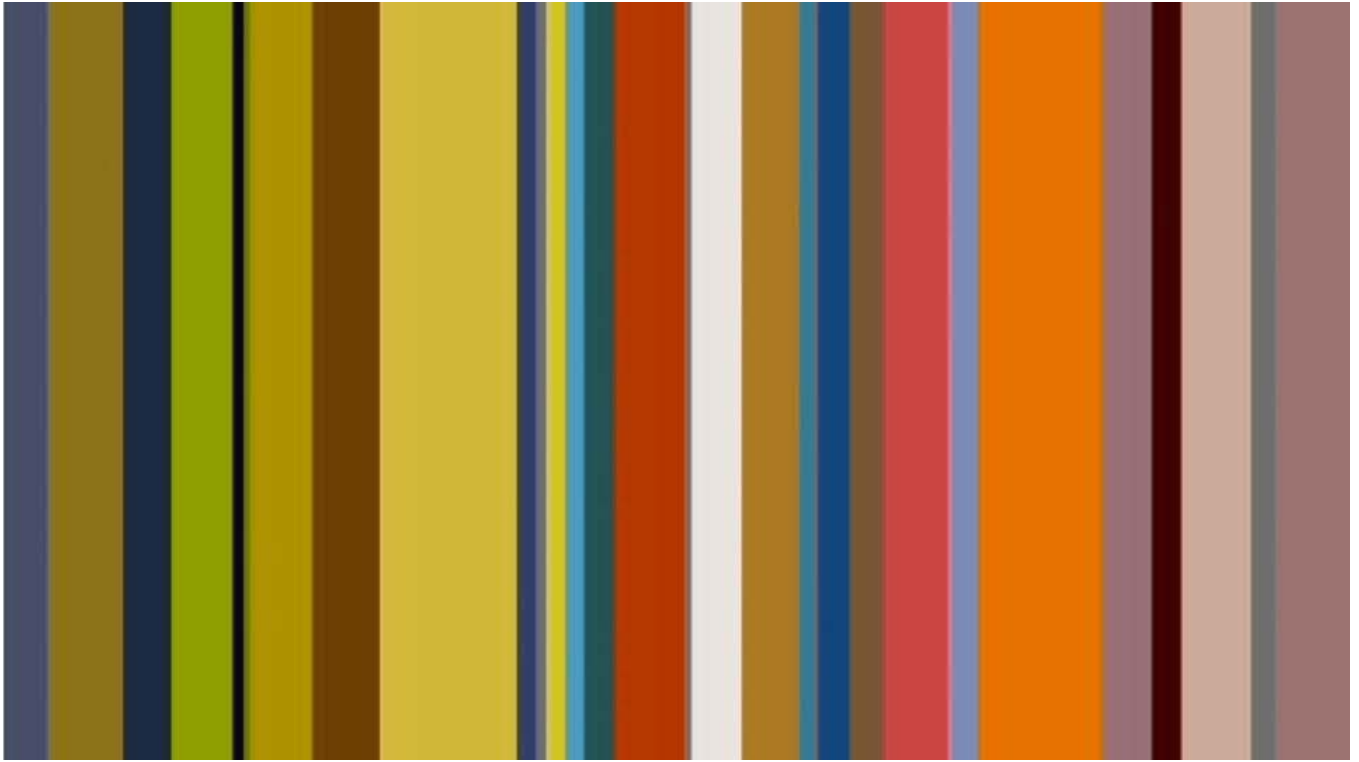
Walid Raad, *Préface à la quatrième édition*, video still, 2013. © Walid Raad

Raad also employs a combination of minimal stratagems, such as the fine catalogue-book *Preface to the Third Edition*, to assemble Hughes Dubois' wonderful photographs of Islamic pieces, and eventually reveals that the Department of Islamic Art's whole collection is actually a subtext of strategic importance. Walid Raad has already accustomed us to these techniques with his [Atlas Group](#), giving us dazzling bursts of realism on the Lebanese and Middle Eastern situation, always via a poetic use of Spartan representation procedures. Now, it is the museum and the cultural institution that are being reread and explored, their power to create coercive beauty laid bare by the very Minimalism of the display.



Walid Raad, *Préface à la quatrième édition*, video still, 2013. © Walid Raad

The artist admits he is an expert on neither Islamic art nor the pieces he focuses on but he is certain that, when they reach their destination, these objects too will be insidiously changed, far more so than museum curators, conservators or directors could predict. The accompanying film, installation and book focus on this very change. Something that greatly resembles a prophecy emerges in this *Preface to the First Edition*: Walid Raad is convinced that even the selection, sample and loan of a small number (28 objects in all) of the 18,000 pieces from the Department of Islamic Art to the new Louvre in Abu Dhabi will trigger a strong sense of estrangement. Their fate is sealed and they will no longer be the same when they have to bear witness to their belonging to and identity in the Islamic world, inside the walls and beneath the perforated domed ceiling of the new museum. *Ivo Bonacorsi*



Walid Raad, *Préface à la quatrième édition*, video still, 2013. © Walid Raad