

Walid Raad: Miraculous Beginnings

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14 October 2010 – 2 January 2011

Whitechapel Gallery

77-82 Whitechapel High Street

London E1 7QX

www.whitechapelgallery.org

The Whitechapel Gallery presents the first major UK exhibition of US-Lebanese artist, Walid Raad.

One of the most important artists from the Middle East, Walid Raad says his work 'was in some ways made possible by the civil wars in Lebanon'. He playfully considers the effects of conflict not only on body and mind, but also on art itself. The Whitechapel Gallery presents his most important works from the past 20 years for the first time in *Walid Raad: Miraculous Beginnings*.

Now living in the US, Raad's work *The Atlas Group* (1989-2004) is rooted in his experiences as a teenager in Beirut during the Lebanese Civil Wars (1975-90). His artworks, presented as documents and attributed to fictional as well as historical figures, narrate and visualise stories about the Lebanese wars of the past three decades. His images piece together a complex story of modern Lebanon—a history which still cannot be taught at school—with Raad's exploration of photographic medium, its materials and conventions.

Raad has said growing up in Beirut he wanted to be a war correspondent —'I didn't have to go very far. It was right outside the house.' Being in a city at war directly affected his work—rather than seeing photographs as

impartial documents, Raad says 'in a city that is divided, a photograph can generate all sorts of facts: some military; others cultural; and yet others aesthetic.'

The exhibition begins with photography and videotapes by *The Atlas Group* (1989 – present), Raad's project on the Lebanese wars. He queries conventional distinctions between fact and fiction and asks how history, in particular one characterised as traumatic, can be told and visually represented. Key works include the photographic series *Secrets in the open sea* (1994); *Civilizationally, we do not dig holes to bury ourselves* (1993/2003); *My neck Is thinner than a hair: Engines* (2001/2004); *We decided to let them say, "we are convinced," twice* (2002/2006); and *Let's be honest, the weather helped* (1998/2006), and selected video works.

Sweet Talk: Commissions (Beirut) (1987 – present), shown for the first time, then presents a series of photo assignments Raad gave himself about Beirut to capture the changing face of his home city.

The final section, *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World* (2008 – present), looks at the boom of contemporary art in the Middle East and how this affects artists working in the region. The centre piece is a model of an imaginary gallery with scaled-down versions of *The Atlas Group's* archives displayed on the walls. Originally shown at the Sfeir-Semler gallery in Beirut (the first 'white cube' gallery for contemporary art in Lebanon), Raad says, 'My artworks, especially those from *The Atlas Group*, shrunk once they entered the Beirut gallery.' The model is accompanied by large-scale almost monochromatic plates, whose colours are 'borrowed' from documents such as letter heads and exhibition catalogues in an attempt to connect with artworks and artists from the future and the past. The exhibition ends with a large-scale projection imagining views within museums currently under construction in the Arab world.

Notes for Editors

- Walid Raad was born in 1967 in Chbanieh, Lebanon, a village where his father grew up and lives, then as a child lived in East Beirut. He left Lebanon in 1983 aged 16 on a boat for Cyprus, then left Cyprus for the US, where he stayed with his brother and attended high school and college. Raad moved to Rochester (New York) in 1985 and attended the Rochester Institute of Technology where he majored in Photography and Middle East Studies. In 1989, Raad enrolled in the University of Rochester's new Visual and Cultural Studies PhD programme. Raad has exhibited at the Whitney Biennial in 2000, documenta 11 in 2002, the Centre Pompidou, and taken part in the Whitechapel Gallery's *A Short History of Performance*.
- *Walid Raad: Miraculous Beginnings* is curated by Achim Borchardt-Hume, Chief Curator, Whitechapel Gallery.
- *Walid Raad: Miraculous Beginnings* coincides with *Scratching on things I could disavow: A history of art in the Arab world*, Le Centquatre, Paris, 6 November – 5 December 2010. Part of Festival d'Automne à Paris.
- *Walid Raad: Miraculous Beginnings* is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue co-published by Whitechapel Gallery and Festival D'Automne à Paris with contributions by Walid Raad, Achim Borchardt-Hume, Chief Curator, Whitechapel Gallery, Helene Chouteau, writer and curator, Alan Gilbert, writer and poet, and Blake Stimson, Professor of Art History at University of California.
- The artist is creating a limited edition artwork in support of the Whitechapel Gallery's exhibitions and education programme.
- Walid Raad is represented by Anthony Reynolds Gallery in London, Paula Cooper Gallery in New York, and Galerie Sfeir-Semler in Hamburg and Beirut.
- *Walid Raad: Miraculous Beginnings* is supported by: The Henry Moore Foundation and the Walid Raad Exhibition Circle: Clarence Westbury Foundation, Maryam & Edward Eisler, Zaza & Philippe Jabre, Jack Kirkland, Mundas Imaginalis Collection, Maya & Ramzy Rasamny, Maria &

Malek Sukkar and those who wish to remain anonymous.

Visitor Information

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm, Thursdays, 11am – 9pm.
Admission free. Whitechapel Gallery, 77 – 82 Whitechapel High Street,
London E1 7QX. Nearest London Underground Station: Aldgate East,
Liverpool Street, Tower Gateway DLR. T + 44 (0) 20 7522 7888
info@whitechapelgallery.org whitechapelgallery.org

Press Information

The media view for *Walid Raad: Miraculous Beginnings* is at 10am on
Wednesday 13 October 2010, and includes an artist-led tour of the
exhibition.

For further press information please contact:

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*Image above:

Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London; Paula Cooper Gallery, New
York; and Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg and Beirut.