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Mohammad El Rawas: A Comfortable Discomfort

"But all the foregoing (besides sharing the defect of not existing) are mere optical instruments. The faithful who come to the Amr mosque in Cairo, know very well that the universe lies inside one of the stone columns that surround the central courtyard. ...No one, of course, can see it, but those who put their ear to the surface claim to hear, within a short time, the bustling rumor of it. ...The mosque dates to the seventh century; the columns were taken from other, pre-Islamic, temples, for as ibn-Khaldun has written: *in the republics founded by nomads, the attendance of foreigners is essential for all those things that bear upon masonry.*"

Jorge Luis Broges, *The Aleph and Other Stories*

If, by persistently looking in one direction, you can see, hanging near a goddess or a nymph, a mediaeval map drawn by twelfth century geographer Mohammad al-Idrisi; if this goddess or this nymph is Circe, daughter of Helios, god of the sun, and Perse, the Oceanid; if she is represented as she was during the century of the romantics, in the Pre-Raphaelite style, holding a cup full of a magic potion intended for Odysseus; if she is assisted by an attractive yet peculiar contemporary woman; if you realize that Odysseus himself is not Odysseus anymore but the member of one of the fundamentalist groups of our troubled times, roaming the regions outlined in al-Idrisi's map, where south is up; if you can discern a slender woman, with long purple hair that cascades to her feet; if this sexy martial art fighter, this Japanese Manga hero is Uncho Kanu, and if she pretends to be – or perhaps actually is – Circe the Greek; if all these objects, people and symbols belong to different stories; if they simultaneously belong to the past, the present and even the future; if they appear to you slightly altered and tell stories they never told before; if you can see all of these objects, symbols and people, and maybe a few others, in just one glimpse, then, there is no doubt, you are in a narrative derived from the imagination of Mohammad El Rawas, the raconteur, the *Maker of Realities*.



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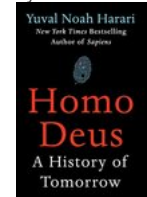


La disparition de Josef Mengele
by Olivier Guez

Laurence Cossé
La Grande Arche



La Grande Arche
by Laurence Cossé

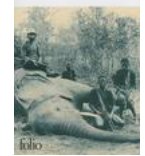


Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow
by Yuval Noah Harari



L'Empereur à pied
by Charif Majdalani

Romain Gary
Les racines du ciel



Les racines du ciel
by Romain Gary



Circe's Assistant, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 140/150cm, 2014

Magical Realism is what best describes El Rawas' complex constructions – or should we say 'deconstructions'. Each one of his compositions is a layered assemblage of objects and techniques, ideas and references. He borrows, modifies, alters, copies, pastes, reinterprets and decontextualizes objects and concepts he finds in the history of art from Italian renaissance to contemporary art, through haute couture and fashion, comics, architecture and photography. El Rawas' juxtaposition of styles, genres and techniques, at times brutal and uncomfortable, always surprising, mirrors the intertextuality and absurdity of our contemporary life. He even orders online the sexy figurines of manga characters that populate his works, turning the act of art creation itself into the most postmodern of our everyday life activities: Internet shopping.

By introducing a third dimension to his works in the 1980s, Mohammad El Rawas takes the art of assemblage as forged by American artist and sculptor Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) to the realm of Magical Realism. For his "Medici Boy", for example, Cornell borrows Pinturicchio's famous "Portrait of a Boy" (c. 1500). The box, the juxtaposition of objects, the borrowing, everything evokes a Cornell-Rawas filiation. Mohammad El Rawas is thus part of the tradition of postmodern artists who borrow and decontextualize images shaped by others to combine them with their own creations. In 2013 El Rawas abandons painting to work on creating a series of three-dimensional constructions using multiple materials and techniques. In his latest artistic phase, he goes back to two-dimensional paintings. By doing so, and painting with striking realism the objects, real or imagined, altered or accurate, he juxtaposes on his canvases, he takes the art of assemblage, the process of deconstruction and the idea of Magical Realism to a whole new level of virtuosity.



Joseph Cornell, Medici Boy, Construction, 1942-52

Remarkably, by looking at the art of Mohammad El Rawas through the lenses of literature, one can further apprehend his talent as a raconteur. Indeed, El Rawas' audacious amalgams and borrowings resemble French writer Michel Houellebecq's use of intertextuality and pastiche, while the peculiar atmospheres of the imaginary worlds generated by these very amalgams evoke yet another writer, Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami. Like these two authors, El Rawas epitomizes Postmodernism in its most accessible and understandable dimensions. All three contemporary artists excel at the art of deconstruction.

For French philosopher Jacques Derrida who coined the concept, 'deconstruction' is not the process of 'undoing construction'; there is a word for that, it is 'destruction'. *Deconstruction* is the amalgam of two words i.e. destruction and construction. Therefore, a process where destruction and construction take place simultaneously is a process of *deconstruction*. It is a process through which the artist, by inflicting destruction



Camille Ammoun
Art from the Middle East

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on something, constructs something else. That's what El

The Saga of a Reclining Model, Oil, Acrylic, Mixed media and Assemblage on Plywood panel, 90/89/3cm, 2009

Rawas does in a composition like "The Saga of a Reclining Model", Houellebecq in a novel like "The Map and the Territory", and Murakami in his monumental "1Q84". Consequently, Houellebecq's literary assemblages and Murakami's juxtapositions of unrealistic tableaux produce an all too Rawas-ian puzzling uneasiness.

Michel Houellebecq masters the subtle art of borrowing and decontextualizing the styles of authors that predated him. The reader can find in his texts accents suggesting Balzac in a sentence like "Et si le voyageur éphémère veut bien rappeler à sa mémoire...", Camus in the beginning of the sentence "Assisté à la mort d'un type, aujourd'hui...", Lautréamont in some of his poetic descriptions of rural France, etc. Houellebecq also makes use of texts he finds outside literature per se. He borrows from sources as diverse as advertising, recipes, math problems or the user's manuals of electronic devices. He advocates the use of all sorts of 'raw materials' in literature. In "The Map and the Territory", he copied from Wikipedia a description of how flies have sex. He argues that taking passages word for word is not stealing as long as the motives are to recycle them for artistic purposes. His whole style is based on borrowing banal and technical descriptions from everyday life and weaving them into something artistic.

Rushdie Samir Kassir Sex Street Art Syrie Vidéos Villes



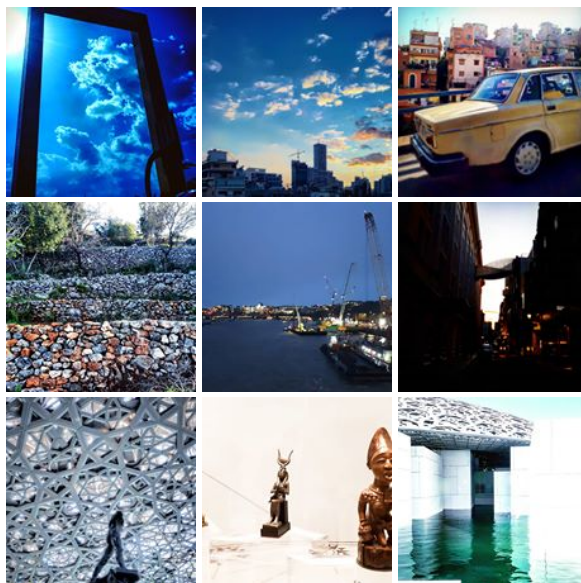
Camille Ammoun @CAmmoun

How the perception of the #city of #Beirut evolved over one century >> from Sophie Yeramian to Zena Assi @zena_assi

9:38 AM - Jan 5, 2016

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Instagram



Inclinations, Oil, Acrylic, Mixed media and Assemblage on Plywood panel, 109/99/6.50cm, 2010

Haruki Murakami uses creative writing techniques to create altered atmospheres loaded with conspicuous sexual tensions. In his monumental best seller, 1Q84 is an alternate version of year 1984 with an obvious reference to George Orwell. In 1Q84, two moons instead of one are hanging in the sky and the same causes do not produce the same effects. The Sakigake cult described in the novel is a historical reference to the Aum Shinrikyo cult, which was responsible for the Sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway in 1995. The abrupt speech patterns of 17-year-old dyslexic high school student Fuka-Eri is compensated for by the enthralling shape of her breasts, while part-time assassin Aomame, the main female protagonist who thinks her breasts are asymmetrical, has an unbridled sex life with older men she meets in Tokyo's bars and hotels. Like Murakami, El Rawas makes

use of sexual tension and historical or artistic references to create the peculiar atmospheres of his assemblages.

The concomitant use by El Rawas of techniques as opposed as photorealism and surrealism, resonates with the world of Magical Realism, of which some characteristic features are the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre, skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic descriptions, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable. The use of different materials found in places that do not naturally belong together, the mysteries left unresolved, the hentai-like sexual tensions, the altered, foreign yet familiar atmospheres, immerse the Rawas reader in a throbbing comfortable discomfort.

A short version of this text was published in Mohammad El Rawas' catalogue 'Apotheosis of Woman' that accompanied the solo exhibition of the artist at Agial art gallery in Beirut, in May 2016.

Posté par [Camille Ammoun](#) [Aucun commentaire:](#)
Location: [Beirut, Lebanon](#)

dimanche 3 mai 2015

L'Oiseau



Posté par [Camille Ammoun](#) [Aucun commentaire:](#)
Location: [Beirut, Lebanon](#)

samedi 16 février 2013

Beirutopia: A Rebuttal.

This post is a rebuttal to Ambassador Tom Fletcher's publication on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Blog: [Beirutopia](#).

Today Lebanon turns 100. I am watching the celebrations on TV from my Dubai Marina apartment. After almost 15 years working in policy making in the Gulf, I still haven't found a way to put my competencies to the service of my country. Listening to the official speeches at the celebration on Martyrs' Square does not make me believe this could happen anytime soon.

The highlight of the celebration is the participation of so many talented poets, musicians and filmmakers. Many international leaders are present. Lebanon's new wealth, the result of huge amounts of offshore gas, is attracting great interest. At many points in the last few years, I thought the time had come for me to come back from my long expatriation. Especially after the 2015 Israeli *blitzkrieg* against Hezbollah, when gas revenues allowed Lebanon to recover and rebuild even faster than in 2006. The resilience of this country will always surprise me.

The Syrian civil war had ended and Israel thought it had a window of opportunity to end once and for all the threat at its northern border. This was another misreading of what post Arab spring Middle East had become. The 2015 war on Lebanon created an unprecedented wave of solidarity in the region bringing together the newly formed Syrian government, Gulf countries, Egypt and Iran. Many former Free Syrian Army fighters even crossed the border and joined the resistance in Lebanon.

The new balance of power that followed the war opened an era of prosperity for Lebanon. But the great reconciliation between Iran, Muslim Brotherhood countries (i.e. Syria and Egypt), and Gulf countries in addition to the local agreement between the different political groups on an 'equitable' sharing of offshore gas revenues, allowed the Lebanese political class to further lock government work and perpetuate itself through more clientelism and corruption. Hence, turning what could have been a chance for me to come back to Lebanon into another lost opportunity.

Back to the 100th celebrations, the newly elected Syrian President is guest of honor. He is standing on the main stage with the three Lebanese presidents. Since the 2017 legislative elections, the regional reconciliation allowed Lebanese parties to resuscitate the 2013 so called "Orthodox Gathering Electoral Law". As a result of what is now shamelessly called the new sectarian system, the prime minister is picked by the Future party, the speaker by the Amal-Hezbollah tandem, and the president by the Christian coalition that includes the Lebanese Forces, the Kataeb and the Free Patriotic Movement. It is amazing how sharing the cake of a gas rent can reconcile everybody, and how 'March 14' and 'March 8' sound like labels from a forgotten era.

Of course, the Treaty of Recognition and Cooperation signed between Syria and Lebanon in 2014 established an equal relationship and the border was demarcated. In his speech, the President said that as global power shifts South and East, we are on the cusp of a new Levantine age. He praised the new Middle Eastern reconciliation that allowed Lebanon to thrive and become the stable and prosperous country it has been since the last Israeli aggression in 2015. He also said he was confident this reconciliation was the only guarantee against Israel's colonial project in the region.

It is true that the gas rent and the reconciliation of regional powers gave Lebanon a stability it never saw in its chattered 100 years of existence. This came at a price. Political debate is dead; democracy and secularism are old memories. A facade freedom of expression is maintained but political participation is inexistent. The key dividing line is over what to do with the income from gas and how to share it among the different political parties.

Some of the officials and MP's arrived at the ceremony on the new citytrain, one of the flagship projects of Lebanon 2020, a government driven modernization project. Oil and gas revenues have funded the repair of the National Grid leaving generators a distant memory, as well as a series of touristic mega projects - like the infamous Cedar Island - at the heart of the remarkable tourist boom of recent years. Of course these projects were conducted at the expense of Lebanon's fragile natural environment and its vanishing historical and architectural heritage. Nevertheless, Beirut is now a top citybreak destination and Lebanon at 100 is still an extraordinary, talented, resilient, hopeful, diverse, beautiful and enchanting place. The Eurozone President even commented that Lebanon was now a Dubai with more oil or a Qatar without the World Cup.



PS, My 15-year expatriation in the Gulf is finally coming to an end. A few days ago, I accepted a job offer as a policy advisor to the Syrian Ministry of Environment. In two months, I will be leaving my Dubai Marina apartment to start working in what is now the only real, genuine and thriving democracy in the Arab world. I am also very excited to live in Damascus that now has the world's first car-free city center and where the effort to discover and renovate ancient ruins is at the core of the new mayor's strategy. Also, since the Masnaa border is open to free circulation, Lebanon is a 1-hour drive from Damascus. I will always be able to drive there to spend my weekends in the company of old friends and enjoy Beirut's nightlife. Sky Bar is not my cup of tea... but once in a while, why not!

A fantasy? Cynical? It depends on you. Tell us what you think. #Leb2020

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Laurence Cossé
La Grande Arche



Yuval Noah Harari
New York Times Bestselling
Author of Sapiens
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A History of Tomorrow

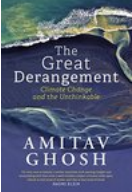
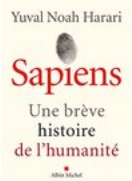
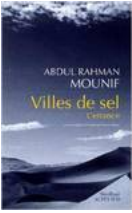


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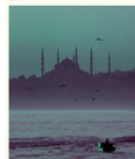
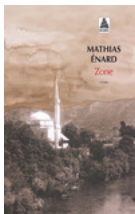
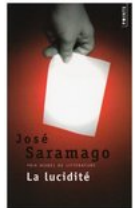
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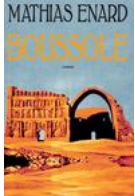
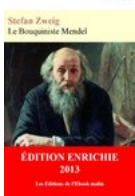


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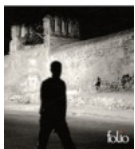








Albert Camus
L'étranger



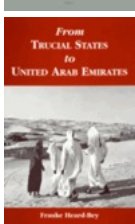
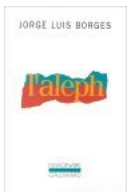
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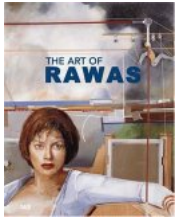


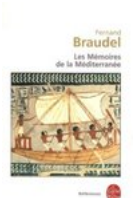
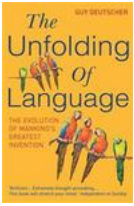
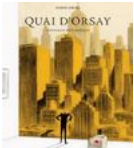
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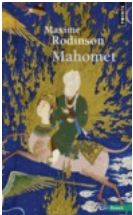
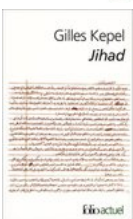
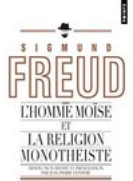
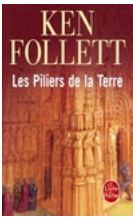


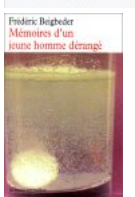
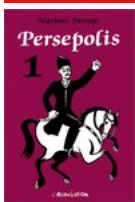
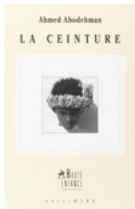
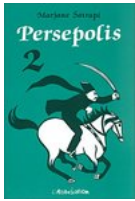


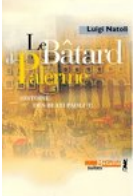
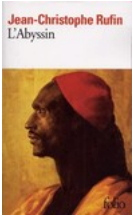


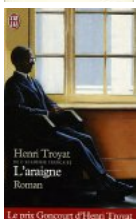
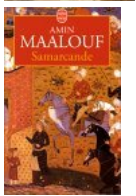
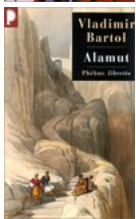
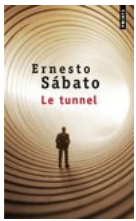


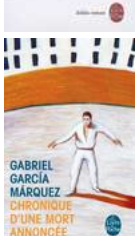
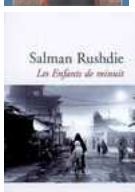
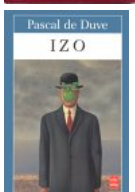
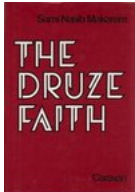
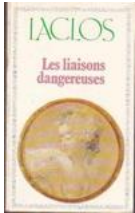
Italo Calvino
Les villes invisibles



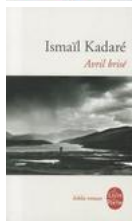








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