Walid Raad

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Introduction

Through processes of archiving, story-telling, and performance, Walid Raad’s work explores how historical events of physical and psychological violence affect bodies, minds, culture, and narrative. His practice investigates the role that documents, photographs, and memories play in the telling of history, asking whether documentary traces of historical events and experiences can ever fully capture the “truth” of what happened.

One major strand of Raad’s work studies the events and afterlives of the Civil War in Lebanon (1975–91), where Raad was born in 1967. Yet his practice is less concerned with recounting the history of the Civil War than the impossibility of doing so directly. Through extended research-based projects, Raad inhabits various roles as an archivist, teacher, historian, actor, and artist to investigate strategies of fiction and imagination as alternative modes of conveying truths.
Guiding Questions

How do we tell a truth? How do we perform a truth? How do we teach a truth?

“Tell all the truth but tell it slant,” Emily Dickinson famously wrote. Dickinson’s poem reflects the complexity of telling truths—a key theme of Walid Raad’s work.

Raad’s work asks us to think about “a truth” or multiple truths rather than “the truth,” or one single definitive account. It also asks us to think about how truths are made: how are they assembled from documents, images and memories? How can truths be told about events that are not documented, or only documented in fragmentary ways? What strategies are needed to tell truths in various settings: in the news, the museum, history books, or the classroom?

In his extended work The Atlas Group (1989–2004), Raad’s investigations of truth-telling focus on ways of recounting the history of the Lebanese Civil War of 1975–91. As a lengthy, complex, and destructive period of fighting between multiple different factions in Lebanon, including the military and political interference of several regional and international powers, the Civil War is a difficult event to recount. Events of physical and psychological violence create gaps—both materially, by damaging or destroying records, photographs, and urban structures; and psychologically, as our memories tend to block out traumatic events. The Civil War’s history is also contested, as the many factions involved may seek to tell a different version (their version) of events.

By investigating an event that makes telling “the truth” impossible, Raad suggests that truth-telling in general always involves acts of fiction and imagination. He asks us to think about whether we can tell a truth in a straightforward way. He also asks what it means to perform a truth by acting it out in front of others. And he asks us to think about how we can teach a truth, or convey it to learners in the form of knowledge.
Activities

The following exercises are structured to sequentially build on each other. We encourage you to consider how their learning objectives develop as you engage with these activities or adapt them to your teaching.

Activity 1: Responding to the Guiding Questions

Activity 2: Documents

Activity 3: Probable Passage

Activity 4: Interview with Walid Raad

We would also love to hear how you have used Reading Resources. Please share feedback and student work [here](#).
Activities: Teens and Adults
Activity 1: Responding to the Guiding Questions

How do we tell a truth?
How do we perform a truth?
How do we teach a truth?

— Before you respond to each question, first take a moment to do a word map around “truth.” Free associate until you have at least 8-10 words or ideas written out that help you unpack what “truth” means to you.

— Take a few minutes to respond to each question with a “focused freewrite:” brainstorm ideas openly while keeping in mind the question you are addressing. Rather than trying to answer the question itself, aim to generate as much thinking as possible. You can start with whichever question you prefer.

— Now that you’ve spent some time with each question, return to the verbs you see in each one. What does it mean to tell? What does it mean to perform? What does it mean to teach? Write out what first comes to mind.

— Now go back to step #2 and add these additional thoughts to your focused freewriting.
Paper cutouts on wall, two-channel video, dimensions variable. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.
Activity 2: Documents

What is a document?
What does it mean to document?

— Take a few minutes to respond to these two questions in writing and, if applicable, in group discussion.

— As you respond, come up with examples of documents and forms of documenting. What kinds of documents are there? Who documents? What institutions are responsible for collecting and storing documents?
One hundred pigmented inkjet prints, 9 7/16 × 13 3/8 inches each. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.
The Atlas Group

The Atlas Group (1989–2004) is a project Raad developed to research and document recent and contemporary events in Lebanon, including the Civil War between 1975 and 1990.

The work is based on a fictional organization called The Atlas Group Archive that is dedicated to documenting these histories. Within the work, Raad acts as the organisation’s archivist to collect photographs, audio-visual materials, and other documents. The sources of these documents include a number of different fictional characters, such as the historian Dr. Fadl Fakhouri.


Otherwise stated, the project interrogates how we define a “fact” when events of violence disrupt physical archives and human memories? How can we tell, perform, and teach truths about such events?

A comprehensive archive of The Atlas Group can be viewed online here. The activities below can be completed online by asking students to open up the website. They can also be completed offline by using the PDF print out of this guide.
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— Before beginning: if you have access to the website, open The Atlas Group home page and make 3-5 observations about it. What do you immediately see?

— Take a look at the work titles below. If you are working online, view the work titles on the left side of the website page. Choose one that sticks out to you and write it down on a piece of paper.

Notebook volume 38
Notebook volume 57
Notebook volume 72
Civilizationally, we do not dig holes to bury ourselves
Miraculous beginnings & No, illness is neither here nor there
I only wish that I could weep
We can make rain but no one came to ask
My neck is thinner than a hair
They thought they would be safer at home
Oh God, she said, talking to a tree
Secrets in the open sea
Better be watching the clouds
We have never been more populated
I was overcome with a momentary panic at the thought that they might be right
Hostage: The Bachar tapes
Hostage: The Bachar polaroids
I might die before I get a rifle
Let’s be honest, the weather helped
I want to be able to welcome my father in my house again
We are a fair people. We never speak well of one another
We lived so well together
We decided to let them say “We are convinced” twice
Use the title as the start of a sentence, and then finish that sentence. Keep writing until you have a short paragraph that invents or creates what you imagine the title of the work you have selected to be about. (If you are working online, do this before clicking on any links.)

Look at the images of the artworks in the image carousel below and locate the artwork that matches the title you chose. Take a moment to examine the visual features of the image: forms, colours, images, etc. If you are working online, clink the link to the artwork and read the short text that introduces this artwork. What aspects of the image and/or text strike you as interesting? Write that down. Next, write down 3–5 observations as you look at and scroll through the works on the page.

The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, “We lived so well together 003,” 1991/2021. From a series of inkjet prints, 70.1 x 58.4 cm each. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.
Fifteen pigmented inkjet prints, 30 x 40 cm each. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.

Twenty four pigmented inkjet prints on archival paper, 25.4 x 20.3 each. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.
The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, “Miraculous beginnings & No, illness is neither here nor there,” 1993/2000. Still from one of two S8mm films. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.
Twelve pigmented inkjet prints, 160 × 212 cm each.
Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.

Sculpture, 320 cm Ø, produced in two parts high density foam. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.

One of twenty inkjet prints, 20 × 20 cm. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.

Pigmented inkjet print, 468 × 724 cm. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.
The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, “We Can Make Rain But No One Came to Ask,” 2006. Video, color, sound, 17min 45s, image 4:8. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.
One hundred pigmented inkjet prints, 9 7/16 × 13 3/8 inches each. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.
The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, “We are fair people. We never speak well of one another _ 002,” 2014.

Walid Raad, “We decided to let them say, ‘we are convinced’ twice. It was more convincing this way,” 1982/2004 From series of fifteen pigmented inkjet prints, 110 × 171 cm each. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.

The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, “I want to be able to welcome my father to my house,” 1990/2018. From a set of ten pigmented inkjet prints, 50 × 64.6 cm each. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.

The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, “Oh God, he said, talking to a tree,” 2004/2008. Thirtyone pigmented inkjet prints, 43.1 × 55.9 cm, each. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.
One of six pigmented inkjet prints, 111 × 173 cm each. Copyright Walid Raad, courtesy the artist.
— Once you’ve done this, focus in more closely on one of the images. If working online, click on the image to make it larger. Make 3-5 more observations and write them down.

— Go back to the writing you did in response to the Guiding Questions (How to tell a truth; how to perform a truth; how to teach a truth?). Drawing from your thinking around ways of telling truths here, describe what you think this artwork is about. Make sure to have at least a few sentences discussing your observations and your predictions.
Activity 3: Probable Passage

Probable Passage is a pre-reading strategy used by teachers to support students to begin engaging with important, sometimes unfamiliar, words as a way to set the stage for the actual reading of a narrative text.

It prompts students to begin using their prior knowledge, predicting and creating categories of knowledge (plot, characters, theme, etc.) before they start reading.

There are several ways to use this strategy, but the common approach is to compile words and then ask students to:

— Categorize them within the provided categories; and

— Use the categories to begin making predictions about the larger text before reading.

In this case, we have adapted Probable Passage so that learners and educators using this Reading Resources guide can engage with more complex terminology after first spending some time with his project The Atlas Group in Activity One. The instructions below are one possible approach to using this activity and we encourage you to adapt this in any way that makes sense for your students and teaching context.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Documentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Taxonomy</td>
<td>Repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decontextualization</td>
<td>Magical Realism</td>
<td>Absurdity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
<td>Interdependence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Propable Passage Chart
— Look at the keyword chart and identify the words you know and/or have associations with. Write down those definitions or associations.

— For the words you do not know, make guesstimates (no wrong answers).

— Once this is done, look up words or use the definitions provided to you. You can then compare how your predictions measure up. Take a moment to reflect on what you didn’t know and hold onto new information.

— Return to the artwork that you considered in Activity Two. Does the language of the title relate to the key terms presented here? Would you add any key terms in the remaining boxes? Please write down your response.

— Organize the terms into categories. You can choose: 1) Fiction, Nonfiction 2) Fake, Real or 3) Art, Life. If there are particular terms that are hard to categorize, that’s important. Please note them.

— Once you have organized the key terms into categories, using the artwork you considered from Activity Two to help guide you, do some reflective writing about this exercise. Some questions you can respond to: What did this Probable Passage help you to see? What terms felt difficult to categorize and why? What might be important about that? What top three key terms do you think the artwork you analyzed in Activity Two deals with and why? Please use any of your observations or return to some of your writing from Activity Two to build upon here.
Further Exploration

The Lebanese Civil War encompasses a series of conflicts between multiple forces in Lebanon and the wider region, including foreign invasions and occupation, spanning from 1975 to 1991.

While the causal factors, actors, and events of the War are highly complex, several key factors can be identified. These include divisions between wealthy and poor; an unequal distribution of political power between sectarian groups; demographic shifts and the growing presence of Palestinian refugees displaced as a consequence of the conflict between Palestine and Israel on Lebanon’s border; struggles over Lebanon’s geopolitical alliances; and the unequal distribution of financial resources within the world economy, among others. The Civil War took between 90,000–150,000 lives, caused 18,000 people to go missing, and internally displaced 800,000 people. It also destroyed much of Lebanon’s urban and civic infrastructure.

Many of the tensions that fuelled the War have continued in the present, and telling its history remains contentious. Many actors seek to present their version of events while the Lebanese state has preferred a policy of historical amnesia, refusing to foster broader public discussion and debate on the War’s history to the extent that it is not taught in the national school curriculum. In this context, writers, journalists, and artists – including Walid Raad – have played important roles in the work of unearthing and reflecting upon the War’s history.

Note to Educators: This short primer offers expanded contextual information on the Civil War and may be a useful resource for preparing the exercise.
— Browse this timeline of Lebanon’s Civil War. As you read, mark any of the events that feel relevant to the artwork you analyzed in Activity Two and Three.

— Once you have finished reading, take a moment to quickly capture in writing some of your first reactions, responses, thoughts, etc.

— Now, turn to the events you marked from the timeline. What do you notice about them? Do they share any particular patterns or overlap?

— In writing, consider why you chose these particular events in relation to the artwork you analyzed in the first two Activities. How does the artwork point to (or make you think of) these events? Please consider the artwork’s subject matter but also its form: colors, position on the page, shape or size, etc.
Activity 4: Interview with Walid Raad

Walid Raad plays many roles across his artwork and practice. Some of the roles he wears are: artist, historian, teacher, tour guide, and archivist. We held a short interview with Raad about his work as an educator.

As you read the interview with Raad, please engage in the following prompts and questions.

— Pre-reading strategy: Create a word map for each of the roles that Raad plays (artist, historian, etc.). Brainstorm all of your associations: artist, art historian, actor, tour guide, and archivist. Then write in response to the following questions: What does each role do? Where do they typically work? What questions about the role do you have?

— As you read the interview, underline where you think Raad might be playing a particular role. Where do you see Raad being a tour guide, or where do you see Raad being a historian? You can use different colored ink for each role or find a way to visually mark each one (box for actor, underline for artist, circle for art historian, etc.)

— After you read, take a moment to write down what sticks out to you the most from this interview and write down any questions you have.

— In this interview, Raad includes a passage from Lebanese artist and writer, Jalal Toufic. In writing, discuss why you think Raad quotes at length from Toufic. What does Toufic help Raad to say? By quoting Toufic, is Raad playing another role? If so, what?

— Reflection: Toufic uses the phrase “surpassing disaster.” Create a word bubble out of this and spend some time generating associations, thinking, questions, observations, etc. about this term. What does this mean? Return to the artwork you analyzed in Activity Two and consider in writing what this artwork has to do
with the “surpassing disaster.” How does the artwork relate to this phrase and your thinking about it above? Even if you are not sure, experiment and play with some possibilities. No wrong answers here!

— Consider the long passage by Toufic that Raad includes in his interview. Can you identify one phrase that strikes you as important to Raad’s work? Write this phrase down and write a few sentences explaining why you chose it.
Interview with Walid Raad

— Wendy Tronrud (A.R.T.): When I worked in Cooper Union’s Writing Center a few years ago, before I started the teaching program for the Bard Prison Initiative, I worked with a few students from one of your studio art classes...

If I remember correctly, the course asked students to work in groups formed around bodily fluids (blood, shit, piss, etc.). I’ve always wanted to know more about this course: why did you choose bodily fluids around which to organize the studio art class; why did you articulate collaborative group work as central to the course; what kind of assignments or projects (and the sequence) did students engage with; what did you, as the professor, observe students do as thinkers and artists?

I’d like to know how your art practice has informed your teaching at Cooper Union over the years. What courses did you teach this year? How would you describe your approach or methodology to the courses you teach? To what extent does it draw on your artistic methods, i.e. your use of fiction and performance?

— Walid Raad: My answers below engage but also ignore some of what you ask. I also add a long quote from the writer Jalal Toufic. I appeal to Jalal for too many reasons, but mainly because I sense that he addresses many of the issues that are raised by your questions...

But first, let me try and answer your questions directly.

I remember the class you mention well, its students and the various student experiments that came out of it. It was a one-off, and I have not taught this class since, and have not returned to these topics again in my teaching. At the time, I was in the middle of an art project about the building of the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. I was working with a group called Gulflabor, and we were concentrating on how the museum was being built, and the working conditions on the ground in Abu Dhabi. I was thinking quite a bit about certain liquids:
how little it rained in Abu Dhabi, but also the various cloud seeding experiments ongoing in the Gulf at the time. I was also concentrating on how much most construction workers sweat as they work in 40 to 50 degree (Celcius) heat. And as you may know, in such conditions, physical labor is quite extreme, so much so that many construction workers no longer urinated. The Cooper Union was strangely linked to all of this as well given that the school’s main source of revenue, the Chrysler Building, was owned at the time by Abu Dhabi. As I was “swimming” in these topics, I thought I’d see how this resonated with the students — especially as the School was swimming “in its own shit” at the time because of the massive debt incurred by our former administration and board of trustees, a debt that was opportunistically, cynically and/or reluctantly “exploited” by that and subsequent administrations and boards to abandon The Cooper Union’s mission of granting every admitted students a merit based scholarship. All of which, as you may know, triggered a series of student-led protests, a lawsuit, and changes to the school’s board and administration.

In terms of assignments, I remember asking the students to produce forms, lines, gestures, volumes, sounds informed by these topics. And I meant “informed” in the loosest ways. But I also asked them to present research findings on the topics at hand: To study the economics of shit, piss, tears, and sweat; to look at historical dimensions, be in medicine, biology, alchemy, etc; To also consider their personal “links” to the topic; As well as how other artists have made artworks with piss, shit and sweat (and the examples are aplenty in the past century.) The idea here was to place side by side the forms/gestures/volumes/sounds they produced with other findings by other artists, writers, scientists, thinkers, etc.

When giving assignments, I try to offer students clear guidance, but also to keep the nature of my prompts somewhat vague. At the end of the day, each student brings with them a whole set of misunderstandings, tangential reasonings, misplaced considerations that may occasionally prove quite generative.

In temps of your question about my observations in that class. I distinctly remember a student coming across a company that sold all sorts of simulated liquids for
scientific research (tears, urine, sweat, bone marrow, breast milk, brain fluid, ear-wax, cholesterol, saliva, nasal fluids, and so on) and how this led them to produce a series of figure drawings where the liquids were the only visible surface of the body. It was a beautiful experiment.

But to answer your question about teaching more generally, I find myself trying to enter students’ worlds, to get some “sense” of where they are/come from/imagine themselves to be: personally, critically, formally, technically, conceptually, spiritually, emotionally, socially, financially, and physically. Of course, this is always very difficult in a 15-week semester. But having come across hundreds of students over the past three decades of teaching, I find myself trying to tighten and loosen whatever box I find myself placing a student in, even when I think that I have encountered this student before. At least, that’s what I tell myself.

Given what I stated above about how writing is a difficult process for me, and given how I find myself consistently going to the writings of Jalal Toufic whenever I need to read something thought-provoking writing about many topics, here I go again. A few years ago, Jalal became Director of the School of Visual Arts at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux Arts, a school that was once quite good. His statement remains for me one of the most thoughtful formulations of what a professor, an school may aspire to do, or not to do. I quote here in full in the hope that others may read it as well. Here it is:

**DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT**

**Notification**

*Established in 1944, the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA) was the first national institution of higher education in Lebanon. Its School of Visual Arts had already become part and parcel of the Lebanese art scene in the 1950s (it was then named School of Painting), and it is so presently. But beyond being part and parcel of the Lebanese art scene, the School of Visual Arts at ALBA will have really mattered, not proved fully reducible to culture, only if it graduates at least*
one artist who manages to “fail better” (Samuel Beckett: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better” [Worstward Ho]); and/or at least one artist who constructs “a universe that doesn’t fall apart two days later” (Philip K. Dick); and/or one artist who sacrificially (since this would require exposing himself or herself to it in the first place) wraps the invasive jouissance currently taking aback vast zones of the region (Syria, Iraq, etc.) into (Hölderlinian) song or (Rilkean) angelic, awesome beauty; and if it enhances if not reestablishes the connection of art and thought, more specifically, of thoughtprovoking art and art-provoking thought, a connection that has for quite a while now been a paradoxical one given that, according to a still valid diagnosis of Heidegger, “we are still not thinking—not even yet, although the state of the world is becoming constantly more thoughtprovoking,” and although fresh thoughtprovoking artworks continue to be made (only to then be largely shrouded by the numerous mediocre works with which they are exhibited in biennales, triennials, galleries and museums).

Some of the School’s Additional Objectives

To provide the students with a “temporary autonomous zone” (to use an expression coined by Hakim Bey [aka Peter Lamborn Wilson] in his 1991 book with the same title) in relation to those of this region’s problems that are outdated, so that he or she would be spared wasting his or her time rediscovering variants of solutions that are often decades if not centuries old.

To lead students to the realization that regarding actual artworks, the issue is not to understand them, but to acquire intelligent and subtle incomprehension with respect to them and to intuit and appreciate their rigor, thus desisting from correcting any seeming failing in them—a correction that impairs not only admiration but also possible criticism of these works.

To develop in students a flair for differentiating between a painting, video, etc., that falls apart even before it is framed or screened and one that does not.

To make students keenly aware that artists collaborate in an untimely manner with
future and past artists and thinkers.

To give students the stark realization: “I’ve never thought before”—not simply about art, but tout court. And then confront the student with what forces him or her to think (for example: the realization that he or she has never thought before? A thoughtprovoking artwork?), and thus with the chance to think, whether or not he or she would use this thinking in his or her art practice or not.

To boost students’ intuition/”’shit’ detector” (Hemingway: “The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shockproof, shit detector”; Frank Auerbach: “I hope I still have what Hemingway called the ‘shit detector,’ that I’m still severe enough with myself if something is not finished to destroy it and start again”) in a period when it is increasingly easy for those associated with the production of works that might be exhibited in galleries, museums, and biennales to fool curators, collectors, audiences, indeed also themselves (Richard Feynman: “The first principle [of having utter scientific integrity] is that you must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool”—including while working on scatology (Sade, etc.)—so that when they graduate they can depend on it to unsparingly destroy those of their works that fall apart before the perceptive spectator blinks.

To provide the student with at least as much art as necessary to counter culture, if not transmute it into tradition (possibly by sublimating it or pushing it toward a special abjection or using it as manipulable stereotypes [as in the novels of Alain RobbeGrillet]). To expose the student to art and thought, which belong to tradition, rather than merely to culture, whether high (exhibited widely in museums and biennales, etc.) or low, both insidious enemies of tradition. Much of what starts as ostensible counterculture ends up as culture—it actually belonged to culture all along; tradition consists of that part of counterculture that continues to be counterculture, perennially. The real artist and the real thinker are not cultured, but countercultured (thus have, among other tasks, to coin adjectives absent from the dictionaries of those who are cultured).

To graduate a number of students who end up producing rigorous works of art—
which is not to say ones that would usher in or contribute to a golden age of art and thought in Lebanon and beyond, since the metaphor of the golden age should have ceased to be used with the abolishment by the US government of the gold standard (the golden age for the use of the metaphor of the golden age was the period when gold acted as the economic standard of value, from 1821 [the year England established it] to 1971 [the year the US government abolished it]). The downside is that such students might be at risk of dying of laughter when they come across a reference to a golden age of theater in Lebanon in the 1960s and 70s.

Caveat Concerning the School

Gilles Deleuze wrote in May 1990: “Foucault located the disciplinary societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they reach their height at the outset of the twentieth... Foucault has brilliantly analyzed the ideal project of these environments of enclosure, particularly visible within the factory... But what Foucault recognized as well was the transience of this model: it succeeded that of the societies of sovereignty, the goal and functions of which were something quite different (to tax rather than to organize production, to rule on death rather than to administer life)... We are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure—prison, hospital, factory, school, family... The administrations in charge never cease announcing supposedly necessary reforms: to reform schools, to reform industries, hospitals, the armed forces, prisons. But... these institutions are finished, whatever the length of their expiration periods... The societies of control... are in the process of replacing the disciplinary societies.” While Deleuze’s prescient words have become more manifest in our day, a quarter of a century after he wrote them, they have been obscured in the context of ALBA’s School of Visual Arts by the accidental problems that have beset this school from around the time he wrote his text. As the school’s new director, I consider that by fixing the largely accidental problems that have undermined the school for several decades, the problems that cannot be fixed by any administration and faculty, since they are symptoms of the ongoing transition from disciplinary societies to societies of control, would come to the fore and become clearer, this making it easier to con-
Jalal Toufic
Director of the School of Visual Arts

Sincerely,
Walid Raad

Wendy Tronrud is the A.R.T. Education Adviser and developed the Reading Resources teaching guides in collaboration with the organization. She was a New York City high school teacher at Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School before doing her doctorate in nineteenth century American literature and poetry at the CUNY Graduate Center. She teaches in Bard College’s Masters in Teaching program and worked as the Associate Director of Education Programs for the Bard Prison Initiative for the past three years. She is now an Assistant Professor of English Education at Queens College, CUNY.
Biography

Walid Raad is an artist born in Lebanon in 1967 and grew up in East Beirut. Compelled to leave during the Lebanese Civil War, he emigrated to the US, where he finished high school. Raad completed his undergraduate work at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York State, where he took classes in photography and Middle Eastern studies. He subsequently received a PhD in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester, completing his dissertation on the capture of Western hostages in Lebanon in the 1980s. During the course of his PhD, he also took a break from his studies to live in Lebanon in the early 1990s, where he participated in Beirut’s lively artistic scene and made long-lasting contacts with artists and writers including Akram Zaatari and Jalal Toufic.

His work engages film, photography, installation, performance, and forms of fictional collectivities to explore how histories are archived, remembered, and re-told. Raad has exhibited work widely across the world, and is currently a Professor of Art at The Cooper Union in New York.
Additional Material

Download the catalog of Walid Raad’s 2015 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.


View Walid Raad’s project Scratching On Things I Could Disavow, ongoing since 2007.

Watch a seminar series led by Walid Raad and Jalal Toufic on “The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster.”

Listen to an audio walkthrough of Walid Raad’s project Scratching on Things I Could Disavow at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Read Alan Gilbert’s two-part essay on Walid’s method of interrogating how history is written, titled ‘Walid Raad’s Spectral Archive, Part I’ and ‘Part II’.

Read Elisa Adami’s text “How to Perform a Truth?” on A.R.T. Notes, responding to one of the Guiding Questions of this Reading Resource.
Colophon

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