

**AGENDA**  
LEBANON

FILM

**'The Flight of the Red Balloon'**  
Metropolis Cinema, Hamra  
Until August 10, 8:30 p.m.  
+961 3 793 065  
Unbeknown to his parents, a mysterious red balloon affectionately follows 7-year-old Simon around Paris. French, with English subtitles.

MUSIC

**Magida al-Roumi**  
Beitdédine Festival  
August 9, 8:30 p.m.  
+961 1 999 666  
Best-known for her song "Am bihlanak ya him ya Loubanan," the diva comes to Beirut upon popular demand in a new production.

**Double Concert: Matteo and Nassib Ahmadieh**  
Beitdédine Festival  
August 12, 8 p.m.  
+961 1 999 666  
The festival closes the season with violin-cellist Ahmadieh and counter-tenor Matteo in a platform for young Lebanese talent.

**'Liban Jazz: Erik Truffaz and Malcolm Braff'**  
Music Hall  
August 26, 9 p.m.  
+961 3 807 555  
French jazz-man Erik Truffaz joins Brazilian pianist Malcolm Braff before the September-release of their new album.

**Hasmik Papian**  
Bacchus Temple, Baalbek  
August 9, 7:30 p.m.  
+961 1 999 666  
The soprano offers her interpretation of Handel, Mozart, Verdi, Puccini and Catalani.

ART

**'Deutsche Vita'**  
Kettaneh Bldg, Gemmayzeh  
Until August 13  
+961 3 399 606  
Stefan Moses' photography explores a range of events and personalities from the German-speaking world.

**Collective Exhibition**  
Janine Rubetz Gallery, Raoucheh  
Until September 24, 6 p.m.  
+961 1 868 290  
Assembling various Lebanese painters including Charles Khoury, Anita Toutikian and Mansour al-Habre, this exhibition aims to show different artistic tendencies from the young to the well-established, from local to those who live abroad.

**'Dreams'**  
Surface Libre Gallery, Jal al-Dib  
Until August 23, 6 p.m.  
+961 4 712 200  
Ukrainian self-taught artist Irina Basali presents 31 watercolor paintings in her first exhibition.

**'Pecha Kucha Beirut 2'**  
Surface Libre Gallery, Jal al-Dib  
August 27, 7:30 p.m.  
+961 4 712 200  
Second round of the Japanese-born concept. Artists, designers and architects present their respective projects, with just 20 seconds allocated to each one.

**Just a thought**  
There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot.  
John Cage (1912 - 1992)  
American Composer

REVIEW

# One artist's version of not getting the picture

Walid Raad's 'A History of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art' is a thought-provoking show

Jim Quilty  
Daily Star staff

**B**ERUT. "To Whom It May Concern," the late John Cage once remarked, alluding to the work of his colleague Robert Rauschenberg, "the white paintings came first; my silent piece came later."

It may be useful to recall Cage's words, and their various artistic ramifications, as you walk into the Sleir-Semler Gallery these days, the venue for Walid Raad's mixed-media exhibition, "A History of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art - Part 1 - Chapter 1: Beirut 1992-2005."

Raad's thought-provoking at times amusing, "history" doesn't include any of Rauschenberg's work. Yet Rauschenberg's absence - the seemingly blank canvases of once-controversial 1953 work "White Painting (seven panels)" - lingers throughout Sleir-Semler's white cube.

Cage's own musical reiteration of Rauschenberg - a composition without music, save the rustling of the audience in the concert hall - is just as palpable, as is his opening salutation.

The first of work you might encounter in Raad's show is "Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 79: Walid Sadek's 'Love is Blind.'"

The piece is a trompe l'oeil of Sadek's original work of that name, mounted in 2006 for the "Out of Beirut" exhibition at Modern Art Oxford.

Sadek's piece purportedly presented ten canvases by

Mustafa Farroukh, a Lebanese artist working in the 1930s and '40s, hung facing one another on two parallel walls.

Raad accompanies the piece with a text describing in minute detail the deployment of the original work and the circumstances in which Raad says Sadek agreed to lend his work to the present exhibition. Raad does not mention the images Farroukh painted were absent from the Oxford exhibition.

Here, Raad's trompe l'oeil reproduces Sadek's work in false perspective - perhaps a joke on the notion that placing an art object in historical context will provide the public some perspective.

Farroukh's alleged work is as absent from the trompe l'oeil as it was from Sadek's original. Naturally, the reproduction reduces Sadek's text, the real matter of that work, to a hazy, illegible smear.

Proceeding in a counter-clockwise fashion, you encounter a glass plate informing you the next piece is called "Index XXVII: Artists."

What you find appears to be three blank walls.

It is only in stepping closer that you find that the surface's 22-meter length is tinged (more or less at average eye level) with a single, straight line of white, paste-on stencils (vinyl, as it happens) of Arabic-scripted names. The first word to appear on the far right is "and," while the last name on the far left is cut in two.



"Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 8a: Museums."

As the (unassigned) exhibition essay distributed to gallery patrons kindly explains, the names belong to "over 150 artists who have worked in Beirut over the past one hundred years."

A series of white-on-white names may make for an indistinct referent but there is an apparent meaning: disengaged from the art work that conditions their identities, the artist's names are themselves barely distinguished from the surface against which they are represented.

As the exhibition essay explains, the names mark "the white cube gallery space as the condition of both the visibility and invisibility of the artist as a figure with a name, a history, and a biography."

## Rauschenberg's absence lingers throughout the gallery's cube

A two-causal glance might conceal Raad's next piece as well. "Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 8a: Museums" is an installation, a "miniature" double-width doorway leading into a fictive "room" hollowed out of the gallery wall.

The doorway isn't flush to the floor, but elevated to a height that allows you to see inside - if you bow. Within, the public will find a miniature interior, a bare wall pierced by a pair of doors, though which another passage-way can be seen.

Here, as with "Artists," the strength of the work lies in its ability to lure the curious into performance. "Artists" remains a blank wall unless you ap-



proach. With "Museums," seeking out the art object is as important as the object itself. The necessary bowing to the installation is as significant as the miniature reiteration of the blank wall that stands within.

The miniature motif of "Museums" is echoed in the next piece, "The Atlas Group (1989-2004)" is a scale model of a museum space devoted completely to the work Raad produced during his 15-year association with the Atlas Group.

An art project represented as a research institute interested in the contemporary history of Lebanon, the Atlas Group's central conceptual conceit was the hazy line between the fictive and the factual. Its work interrogated the reliability of documented reality by stretch-

ing it upon a canvas of irony. It provided a rich vein for the artist to mine and the performance and visual works he generated under the Atlas Group's aegis made him a hot property on the international art scene.

One performance piece, still reverberating in the minds of some Beirut scholars, saw Raad appear before an academic conference at the American University of Beirut to present the preliminary "findings" of some Atlas Group research.

He proceeded to tell the delegates the story (reproduced on his video "The Dead Weight of the Quarrel Hangs") of how, during the Lebanese Civil War, Beirut historians would gather at the racetrack and lay bets. They were less interested in which horse would cross the line

first, but in how far off were the images taken at the photo finish. Evidently, there was a scholar or two at Raad's presentation who didn't get the point.

"The Atlas Group" is a finely detailed model, with Raad's photographic works dutifully reproduced in miniature. Diminutive versions of his video works screen on several screens in a continuous loop.

The scale of the museum makes it difficult to see the actual reproductions, which is itself satisfying given what the previous works seems to be saying about the shaky corporeality of the art object.

Anyone wanting to test the quality of the reproductions, however, can simply place his digital camera on the floor of the model and click. The image quality turns out fine, but the image fetishism compelling you to take the photo may later give you pause.

Though Raad has publicly closed the Atlas Group file, those causally familiar with his past work will be tempted to use it as a guide to understanding this show.

The artist seems to have anticipated this tendency and attempted to redirect it. The exhibition essay encourages the public to consider the present exhibition as part of a process that includes the Atlas Group but moves in a different direction.

To paraphrase the exhibition essay, Raad's current project studies notions of "modern" and "contemporary" in Arab art, asking how the work of artists, writers and thinkers can effect the way people can address how and if decades of violence have affected citizens, cities, culture and tradition, materially and immaterially.

When discussing his post-Atlas Group work, here in a recent interview, Raad himself likes to return to Rauschenberg, and specifically the artist's 1953 work "Erased de Kooning Drawing," referenced briefly in his trompe l'oeil of "Love is Blind."

As the story goes, Rauschenberg approached the then-senior artist Willem de Kooning, saying he wanted to make art work from the erasure of one of the iconic artist's drawings. De Kooning cooperated, eventually handing over



A detail from "The Atlas Group (1989-2004)."

a multi-media work on paper. About a month later, it seems, Rauschenberg had more or less erased the art from the paper - save some traces of ink and crayon. There is no photograph of the original work.

Though Rauschenberg's erasure provides a convenient cue, Raad assures you the absence he has in mind is somewhat different. It is partly derived, he says, from certain coincidental thematic echoes he's found in his own work and that of some of his Lebanese colleagues.

His other source of inspiration is the theory of his colleague Jalal Toufi. Among the many theoretical constructs advanced by the film theorist and video artist is "the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster." Certain catastrophes are so great, he suggested, that they change the way you perceive space-time, that the continuity of time and space in a certain circumstances changes."

The relationship between this sort of disaster and art, Toufi suggests, is that of a mirror in a vampire film. It "reveals the withdrawal of what we think is still there.... Does this entail that one should not record? No. One should record this 'nothing,' which only after the resurrection of the withdrawn tradition [can] be available."

"When you hear the story about Lebanese historians at the racetrack during the Civil War," Raad said in a recent interview, "you assume that the photographer simply takes the photographs too soon or too late. What if the world is simply too early for the photograph?"

"We can laugh at the wit and the irony of it. But I'm also terrified of the possibility that [this] might be true."

You may not get any of this from an innocent - or a casual interview. Raad himself likes to return to Rauschenberg, and specifically the artist's 1953 work "Erased de Kooning Drawing," referenced briefly in his trompe l'oeil of "Love is Blind."

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"Appendix XVII: Plates 122-124: Tireless Pursuit IX, (Plate 124)," 2008, 164 x 131.5 cm (framed), Archival Inkjet Prints.



"Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 139: The Atlas Group (1989-2004)."

"Appendix XVII: Plates 16-18: A National Pavilion (2005) (Plate 17)," 2008, 164 x 131.5 cm (framed), Archival Inkjet Prints.

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## su do ku

Sudoku is neither a mathematical nor arithmetical puzzle. It is a logic puzzle. Each sudoku puzzle consists of a 9 x 9 grid that has been subdivided into 9 smaller grids of 3 x 3 squares. To solve the puzzle, fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3 x 3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9. In each row, column and box the numbers 1-9 can only appear once. To make a start, look at each of the boxes and see which squares are empty, at the same time checking that square's column and row for a missing number. Every sudoku has a logical and unique solution.

9			3					
3			4	8				
1	4		2	7				
	9	8			6			
	5		3	5				
	6		5	3		1		
	9	6				7		
		1						6

# 33

# 34

Solution to Friday's puzzle

6	2	9	1	5	3	8	7	4
7	5	8	4	6	9	1	3	2
1	4	3	7	2	8	5	6	9
5	7	2	8	9	4	3	1	6
9	3	4	6	1	7	2	5	8
8	1	6	5	3	2	4	9	7
2	6	7	3	4	5	9	8	1
4	8	5	9	7	1	6	2	3
3	9	1	2	8	6	7	4	5

## HOROSCOPE

<p><b>Aries (Mar. 21 - April 19)</b></p> <p>You'll do quite well in mental areas. Writing and public speaking are especially favored. However, speak your mind with diplomacy. Make sure you don't act like a wise-guy.</p>	<p><b>Taurus (April 20 - May 20)</b></p> <p>You may be making plans to give a party. Singles may discover a delightful romantic opportunity tonight. Timing in business is probably off so a delay proves aggravating.</p>	<p><b>Gemini (May 21 - June 21)</b></p> <p>Today should see an improvement in your financial situation. But it's still too early to go on a shopping binge. Make sure you get invited to any work or neighborhood soiree by calling around.</p>
<p><b>Cancer (June 22 - July 22)</b></p> <p>You'll be too busy with business and domestic concerns. Try to take a break to relieve your stress. Don't be too impulsive and good luck will follow wherever you go today.</p>	<p><b>Leo (July 23 - Aug. 22)</b></p> <p>This is another fine day for creative work as well as mental interests. Tonight enjoy dating or other happy outings. Pay down some credit cards, bills or any other short-term debts.</p>	<p><b>Virgo (Aug. 23 - Sept. 22)</b></p> <p>You're sure of your goals and you know how best to go about attaining them. Your efforts will meet with success! Don't do anything for anyone that they can do for themselves unless it's a treat.</p>
<p><b>Libra (Sept. 23 - Oct. 22)</b></p> <p>Take a day trip away or enjoy a favorite pleasure on this day for fun. The night allows creative inspirations. We could all use some free time now couldn't we? Make it so.</p>	<p><b>Scorpio (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21)</b></p> <p>Be careful in financial dealings. Unexpected changes in plans may upset your schedule today. A breakthrough is likely tonight - you have got to make the first crucial move however.</p>	<p><b>Sagittarius (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21)</b></p> <p>Expect some changes in business plans today. Do honor your commitments to others. Visitors wear out the welcome mat. Be careful not to spout your favorite BIG ideas and dash with others.</p>
<p><b>Capricorn (Dec. 22 - Jan. 19)</b></p> <p>This is a grand day to begin a decorating project or entertain guests. Unfortunately the pace at work may be a bit slow or tedious for the moment. Compliments you receive are sincere.</p>	<p><b>Aquarius (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18)</b></p> <p>Preach cooperation and understanding in your dealings with a sensitive person today. Try your hand at preparing a gourmet dinner party for someone special tonight.</p>	<p><b>Pisces (Feb. 19 - Mar. 20)</b></p> <p>You'll get a backlog of tasks out of the way and you'll be pleased with your progress. Listen your intuition. Hyperactivity may make it difficult to stay centered on what really matters.</p>