

**SELF-PORTRAITURE AND THE RISE OF “ARAB” ART:  
TAREK AL-GHOUSSEIN, HASSAN MUSA AND WALID RAAD**

by

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Professor Raymond Silverman

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## **DEDICATION**

To Yusuf Ghneim Zarur (baba), Issa Ghneim Zarur (amo),  
the men of Palestine and the women who carry them.

And especially to you, Rima Sahourieh Zarur (mama).

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers three monographic case studies of contemporary artists from the Arab world, Tarek Al-Ghoussein (Palestine/Kuwait), Hassan Musa (Sudan/France) and Walid Raad (Lebanon/US), to challenge the prevalent reading and curatorial framing of non-EuroAmerican contemporary art through generalized notions of identity. I focus on self-portraiture, arguing that the artists use it to complicate assumptions about identity. By including Arab artists of diverse national, geographic, religious and diasporic experiences, I start with the premise that the term “Arab” embodies a broad spectrum of identities. Additionally, I outline a history of the international exhibitions and biennials that have contributed to the rise of art from the Middle East and North Africa. I highlight the role of scholars of African art in this process, for by insisting on the diversity of the term “African,” they included Arab North African artists.

I position Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad within art historical trajectories that illustrate their engagements with western art history while also referencing their collective histories. Al-Ghoussein stages photographs that integrate the genres of self-portraiture, landscape and performance in an interrogation of Palestinian identity, both his as an exile as well as the terrorist connotations prevalent in the media. The themes that emerge—belonging, longing, land and isolation—find resonance in post-1948 Palestinian literature and art. Musa’s paintings illustrate “ArtAfricanism,” a term he coined to critique the art world’s promotion of African art that reflects a narrow conception of African identity. Identifying as “Arab, African and Western,” he

produces artworks that reference the display and performance of essentialized identities. Raad references formative theories about photography and historical avant-garde artists to question notions of truth, institutional authority and authenticity. He does this in two multimedia projects about 1) the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and 2) the burgeoning art industry in the Middle East and Arabian Gulf. Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad each uniquely approach the project of self-portraiture, tempering the representation of identity with strategies that stymie simplistic readings. By elucidating these artists' engagements with western art history, this dissertation argues for the expansion of curatorial and scholarly approaches to artists from outside the EuroAmerican context.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

In 2007, the critically acclaimed and internationally known Lebanese artist Walid Raad initiated *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World* (from here on *Scratching on Things*), a multimedia project that focuses on the significant financial investment in the art world in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly in the Arabian Gulf. Raad himself contributed to this phenomenon with the success of his earlier project, *The Atlas Group* (dates vary), which skyrocketed him towards international art world fame.<sup>1</sup> The art world in the Middle East in the late 1990s when Raad began producing and exhibiting art was nothing like it is today, where national museums, museums of modern art, Islamic art museums, biennials, art academies, galleries, conferences and non-profits dot the art landscape from Marrakesh in the western edge of the region to Sharjah in the East. This activity is attractive to the mainstream art world, whose curators, artists, writers and museum directors attend these international events regularly. Much can be conjectured about this fast development and the relationship between art and national investments. Yet despite the rich possibilities, Raad writes

I am not interested in identifying and unpacking the complex and/or simple motives that prompt the sheikhs and sheikhas, emirs, kings, princes, ministers of culture and others in the Gulf and elsewhere in the Arab world to invest massively in the arts. Rather, I

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<sup>1</sup> The dates Raad attributes to *The Atlas Group* vary, a strategy that is part and parcel of his interrogation of the relationship between authoritative modes of representation and supposed truths.

concentrate on some of the gestures, stories, forms and colors made available by the emerging infrastructures.<sup>2</sup>

In one fell swoop, Raad alerts his audience that he will not touch the content and will instead turn his focus to form. The works that comprise *Scratching on Things* illustrate this: photographs of reflections of a shiny concrete floor, sculptures of architectural components and minimalist color plates, among other things. What makes Raad's project so intriguing is the extent to which it departs from *The Atlas Group*'s archival focus on the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), which prompted readings of the project through more historical and social lenses. The international success of the project made Lebanon and its conflicts the subject of many art exhibitions, which fit well with an art world that had recently begun to listen to the voices of non-European American artists through the increased demand for identity art. Seen in this vein, Raad's unexpected insistence on form rather than content in *Scratching on Things* points to a latent story, what I argue is the use of conceptual art strategies to critique the dominant use of identity as a frame in the art world.

In this dissertation, I examine the work of three contemporary artists whose work I situate within an art historical genealogy in which artists interrogate conventional identity politics prevalent in the art world. While they often participate in identity-themed exhibitions, the artists, Tarek Al-Ghoussein (b. 1962), Hassan Musa (b. 1951) and Walid Raad (b. 1967), do not comply without argument. I focus my readings on self-portraits because they offer a provocative illustration of these artists' willful push against the rhetoric of identity. While art historian Shearer West writes that the "allure" of self-portraits rests in the notion that they "seem to give us an artist's insight into his or her own personality," I read their representations of self as a performance, a posturing that straddles the fence between the expectations of the art world and

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<sup>2</sup> Walid Raad, "Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.scratchingonthings.com/>.

their own concerns.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the photographer Al-Ghoussein, painter Musa and multimedia artist Raad reference art history, including art works and the analyses that have shaped particular moments in the discipline. My focus on this aspect of their work aims to highlight their contribution to the history of art, a process that applies modes of reading and analysis to the issues and histories their work examines.

Therefore, identity and its attendant histories remain a central problem in their work, to which they apply strategies that stymie simple readings of those issues. Whether a reference to Claude Monet's rejection of academic painting by French painters, Marcel Duchamp's response to the assimilation of critical art by the burgeoning museum industry, or François Millet's veneration as "authentic" because of his poor background, their engagement with past art positions them within a genealogy of critical art history. Some of their works head into territories lesser known to western audiences, as in the case of Al-Ghoussein's engagement with Palestinian iconography and its relation to the construction of Palestinian identity. Their considerations of art history derive from their studies: Al-Ghoussein has an MFA from the art department at University of New Mexico, Musa holds a doctorate in art history from the University of Montpellier, and Raad obtained a doctorate in the department of Cultural and Visual Studies at the University of Rochester. This intimate engagement with art's history figures significantly in their work.

Because I define self-portraiture as a stance, I also take heed of what the artists write and say about themselves and their practice. I read between the lines of what is both uttered and withheld, for these artists are keenly aware of the ever-present microscope (such as this study) focused on their biographies. While biography does play an important role in their work, by

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<sup>3</sup> Shearer West, "Self-portraiture," in Portraiture, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 163.

juxtaposing art history and biography, I push at the boundaries framing current understandings of their work. These artists look for fodder in the history of art and use it in order to position themselves against the grain.

### **Identity, diaspora, and the art world**

Identity as a subject in art was part of an important project beginning in the 1960s and 1970s. Historically excluded from positions of agency in the arts, women and people of color began to challenge the ways in which they were represented in art works and investigate the historical underpinnings of the dominant presence of white male artists.<sup>4</sup> Emboldened by political movements such as the Civil Rights Movement, the American Indian Movement, and the Black Power Movement in the United States, and the processes of decolonization taking place throughout the rest of the world, they directed significant critiques towards museums, in an attempt to change the reigning position of women and people of color from the subjects of art works to their authors.<sup>5</sup> In these contexts, identity was evoked to highlight exclusion and reveal the machinations of oppressive forms of representation. By the 1980s, artists began to highlight their identity in an attempt to re-signify blackness or femininity, for example. The work was

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<sup>4</sup> Art historian Linda Nochlin was an important figure in both these contexts. In regards to the former, she was among the first to apply Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism" to visual art, in particular 19<sup>th</sup> century Orientalist painting. Her argument followed Said's, which argued that representations of Arabs in literature served to justify colonialism and imperialism by representing them as irrational, weak, and feminized and therefore in need of intervention. Over ten years prior, Nochlin had written about the historical exclusion of women painters from the art academies, which she argued ensured that the notion of "greatness" would be reserved for male artists. See Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *Art in America* 71, no. 5 (May 1983): 118-131, 187-191; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Art and Sexual Politics*, eds. Elizabeth C. Baker and Thomas B. Hess (New York and London: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1973), 1-10. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> This was wittily illustrated by the Guerrilla Girls, an activist artist group founded in 1985 whose aim is to redress such inequality. One of their 1989 posters asked, "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?" and then responded, "Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female." Juxtaposed with a photograph of a nude woman based on Jean Auguste Ingres' *The Grand Odalique* (1814), the poster emphasizes the activist group's claim. See Guerrilla Girls, "HOW WOMEN GET MAXIMUM EXPOSURE IN ART MUSEUMS," accessed April 2, 2014, <http://www.guerrillagirls.com/posters/getnaked.shtml>.

important, for it enabled a claiming of an authorial positioning, and it precipitated the eventual opening of mainstream museums' doors to those otherwise excluded.

As I will document in Chapter Two, the work of these artists, curators, and academics produced significant results, namely exhibitions and texts that included non-European art and its histories. While the focus on non-European American identity led to the eventual inclusion of diaspora and international artists in art world centers, many argue that this has occurred to a detriment because of its often superficial use. The problem lies in the dominance of identity, for it puts artists in the position, as critical theorist Rey Chow argues, to exhibit or perform their selves repeatedly.<sup>6</sup> Art historian Jacqueline Francis shows that this performance is not a new process. Her 2012 book Making Race: Modernism and 'Racial Art' in America is an examination of the ways in which the work of three non-European artists were received through assumptions about racial and ethnic difference.<sup>7</sup> Francis' study focuses on early 20th century U.S., but she indicates that such a model is in play with the preponderant focus on identity today. While exhibitions themed around particular identities are useful in exposing audiences to lesser-known artists, they also posit racial and cultural sameness. Francis reminds her readers of the reason why identity was summoned to begin with and urges art historians, critics and curators to "examine the functional forms and operations of the artist's institutional critique" instead of "off-handedly" citing an artist's identity.<sup>8</sup>

In this dissertation, I argue that the art world's use of identity politics to consider the work of non-European American artists allows the richness of their work to slip between the

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<sup>6</sup> Rey Chow, Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 112.

<sup>7</sup> Jacqueline Francis, Making Race: Modernism and 'Racial Art' in America (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2012), 4-5. Also see Kymberly N. Pinder, ed. Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 153. Francis did just this in an earlier article. See Jacqueline Francis, "To Be Real: Figuring Blackness in Modern and Contemporary African Diaspora Visual Cultures," *Radical History Review*, no. 103 (Winter 2009): 188-202.

cracks. At the same time, I do not deny that these artists reference their experiences and the collective histories from which they come. Their self-representations are neither straightforward nor are they easy to consume, in large part because Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad frame them with critical art practices. In doing so, they contribute to the history of self-portraiture by performing a rejection of the art world's simplistic references to identity. In particular, exile and diaspora are central themes in their work as well as their biographies. I rely on theorists who consider the concept of diaspora, which encompasses a great many experiences. As the editor of *Diaspora*, Khachig Tölölian wrote in the journal's first issue that, although the term "diaspora" has an association with the Jewish, Armenian and Greek diasporas, today it shares meanings with other groups, including the "immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community."<sup>9</sup> Anthropologist James Clifford similarly emphasized the difficulty of pinning down the concept when he highlighted the ways in which disparate communities are connected transnationally.<sup>10</sup> While Clifford admittedly does not take the issue of gender into his consideration of diaspora, cultural studies scholar Ella Shohat uses feminism to argue for "a polycentric multiculturalism [that] entails a profound reconceptualization and restructuring of intercommunal relations within and beyond the nation-state."<sup>11</sup> She describes multicultural feminism as informed by several diverse sources, including what she terms First World white feminism, socialism, anarchism, Third World nationalism, Fourth World Indigenism, anti-racist diasporic activism and gay/lesbian/bi/transsexual movements, thereby integrating the transnational into the North America-centric notion of multiculturalism.<sup>12</sup> In this way, her approach to representation stems from a "polycentric vision" of the world that has

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<sup>9</sup> Khachig Tölölian, "The Nation State and its Others: In Lieu of a Preface," *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (1991): 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 302.

<sup>11</sup> Ella Shohat, introduction to *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, ed. Ella Shohat (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

“many dynamic cultural locations, many possible vantage points.”<sup>13</sup> Shohat’s edited volume, Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age, developed from a conference, “The World En Route: Investigating Ethnography: Framing the Other: The Institutions of Culture,” held at the New Museum in 1997. Shohat advocated for an intersectional approach that simultaneously considers the issues of class, nation, gender, sexuality and race, locating these issues in the work of artists.<sup>14</sup>

An important result of these theorists’ work has been an emphasis on the diverse articulations of cultural identity outside of the “homeland,” which in the modern period has been the privileged and exclusive site of the nation-state. The critical potential of claiming a diasporic identity is highlighted by claims and assertions of cultural identity not bounded by the boundaries of the nation-state. This concept echoes Benedict Anderson, who offered a corrective to the limits of nation-state based identity formation, arguing that *nation* can be a community imagined by its constituents.<sup>15</sup> The distinction between nation and nation-state rests in the institutionalization of the latter, while the former allows space for communities to forge cross-cultural affiliations that manifest in unique terms. This is not to deny the dominance of the nation-state, nor is it to suggest that such communities are immune to its effects. Rather, such alternative imaginings of community draw on elided histories and experiences that do not conform to the dominant nation-state narrative and its attendant identity, thereby validating them by asserting their presence. Such a conceptualization of belonging is vital to those living outside of their homeland, whether voluntarily or not.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of intersectionality, see Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241-1299.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson insists that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.” Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

The historical contingency of scholarship on diaspora and identity art is evidenced in sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall's important 1989 article, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora."<sup>16</sup> In it, Hall is pressed by emerging Caribbean film to state that we should understand "identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation."<sup>17</sup> In doing so, he illustrated the complexity of self-representation in relation to identity. Hall forcefully challenged the notion of an authentic and essential identity by defining cultural identity as that which emerges from the push and pull of history.<sup>18</sup> Cultural identity is as much about the notion that identity entails a sense of sameness, common roots, and essence as it is about the divergent directions towards which historical circumstances drive a people into the future. Hall developed his definition of cultural identity based on the multiplicities of identities in the African diaspora. His work challenges the possibility that an identity can be authentic, an idea that does not take into account the historical pressures that impact how people relate to the world.<sup>19</sup> He says that

far from being grounded in mere "recovery" of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.<sup>20</sup>

Cultural identity defined thusly allows space for difference within identity categories and renders the assumption of homogeneity impossible.

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<sup>16</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998), 222-237.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> In the anthropological sense, the term "authenticity" refers to cultures (and the people that comprise them) that are "unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched and traditional." See Richard Handler, "Authenticity," *Anthropology Today* 2, no. 1 (1986): 2. Also see Sharon Macdonald, "A People's Story: Heritage, Identity and Authenticity," in Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader, ed. G. Corsane (London: Routledge, 2004), 272-90.

<sup>20</sup> Hall, "Cultural Identity," 225.

Clifford talks about diasporic networks that are comprised of multiple centers and therefore connected.<sup>21</sup> In this conception, the homeland loses its centrality and becomes one among many places that sets the stage for people's lives. Hall's discussion of Afro-Caribbean identities illustrates this multiplicity of centers. Again, rather than consider Africa as an original place, he considers diasporic identity as a process.<sup>22</sup> Diasporic cultural identity is not a thing, but a "matter of becoming."<sup>23</sup> Manifestations of identity in Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad's work are akin to this conceptualization of diaspora. As a Palestinian who is prevented access to his homeland, the place of his parent's birth, Al-Ghoussein's photographs evince a solitary figure who aloofly examines the symbols related to the Palestinian experience. In another series, he wanders throughout non-descript desert landscapes in photographs imbued with ambiguity meant to interrogate the notion of national belonging. His photographs contribute a critique to the primacy of the nation-state and points to an alternative to the notion of belonging. Similarly, Musa's paintings are filled with figures from a myriad of geographies and histories. His juxtapositions highlight characteristics that allow him to critique the art world's consideration of African artists, which he argues privileges a particular identity based on the notion of authenticity. And Raad integrates fiction into real histories and situations, in particular the Lebanese Civil War and the current expansion of the art world in the Middle East. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on Raad's very self-conscious suggestions and insertions of self into the narratives that shape his work. His work posits him a *flâneur* who metaphorically strolls along the store fronts of the art world, keeping a critical distance through his subtle

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<sup>21</sup> Clifford, "Diasporas," 305.

<sup>22</sup> The idea of Africa as an origin brings the danger of understanding it as a static source. Suzanne Preston Blier critiqued this in her examination of cultural syncretism that came before the formation of the African diaspora. See Suzanne Preston Blier, "Vodun: West African Roots of Vodou," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. Donald J. Consantino (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), 61-87. Also see Edna Bay, *Asen, Ancestors, and Vodun: Tracing Change in African Art* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Hall, "Cultural Identity," 222.

appropriations of avant-garde art, with which he critiques the art world's desire to place artists within identity-themed boxes.

I read Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad's self-portraits in terms of what Hall refers to as "positioning." They are acts that demonstrate the artists' complicated relationships with racial and national identity, as men living in diaspora.<sup>24</sup> Al-Ghoussein is a Palestinian who was born into exile and is denied the right to enter his homeland. Additionally, there is no Palestinian nation-state, leaving the door open for challenges to the existence of a Palestinian identity. Raad left his native land of Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War, a war that unfolded out of geopolitical relationships spawned in the wake of colonialism.<sup>25</sup> He has been living primarily in the United States since age fifteen. Musa's Sudanese identity, a mix of so-called "African" and "Arab," is further complicated by the fact that he has been living in France since the 1970s. Caught between the power struggle between England and Egypt, Sudan also suffered the fate of colonialism and occupation.<sup>26</sup>

While it may seem contrary to devote space to these brief biographies in a dissertation which argues against the prevalent use of identity as a frame, I do so to highlight the complexity of their experiences and diversity of their backgrounds. As case studies, they show how the terms "Arab," "Middle Eastern" or "African" become useless as a thematic frame for an exhibition.

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<sup>24</sup> I give a brief outline of their histories here and offer a closer reading in the following chapters.

<sup>25</sup> After World War I, Lebanon, which was formerly part of the Ottoman empire, became a French mandate, a colonial relationship that lasted from 1923 to 1943. For a discussion of Lebanon under Ottoman rule prior to the French mandate, see Engin Akarli, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1886-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For a discussion of what would be the Lebanese nation-state during its formative years, see Meir Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest: The Road to Statehood 1926-1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997). For a discussion of Lebanese politics and the tensions between its religious communities leading up to the Civil War, see Kamal S. Salibi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon, 1958-1976* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1976).

<sup>26</sup> For a historical discussion of the ongoing conflicts in Sudan, including the British colonial practices that fomented racial and ethnic tensions as well as northern oppression of the south (now the Republic of South Sudan, which gained independence on 9 July 2011), see Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* (Oxford: James Currey; Kampala: Fountain; Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003). For a discussion of race and ethnicity in relation to Sudanese politics, see Peter Woodward, *Sudan, 1898-1989: The Unstable State* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers and London: Lester Crook Academic Publishing, 1990).

Musa's exhibition history especially illustrates this point. His work is primarily shown in two different kinds of exhibitions: calligraphy and contemporary art. Because he is a calligrapher of Arabic, his identity is framed as "Arab" in those exhibitions. His contemporary work, on the other hand, is primarily relegated to exhibitions that feature "African" artists. While his artworks evidence a mixing of the two, curators have managed to keep them separate.<sup>27</sup>

The lack of attention to the relationship between Africa and the Middle East in many exhibitions belies what art historian Prita Meier describes as their "intersecting geographies and histories." These intersections, she writes, also "diverge, since studies of Middle Eastern and African modernism(s) emerged respectively from an engagement with the fields of Islamic and "traditional"/"classical" African art history."<sup>28</sup> Sudan exemplifies the inadequacies inherent to the desire to distinguish between "Sub-Saharan" and "North African," for the United Nations groups it with countries in "northern Africa," despite its geographic location south of the Sahara.<sup>29</sup> This is so, political scientist Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe argues, because the government describes the country as "Arab."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the official language in Sudan is Arabic, but the situation is far more complicated. Art historian Olu Oguibe writes that the distinction exists in order to maintain the construction of the black African as inferior.<sup>31</sup> Instead, he argues for "an all-embracing Africanity that supersedes disparities and differences and aspires toward the construction, not invention, of a new and credible Africanity."<sup>32</sup> Despite the richness of this

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<sup>27</sup> An exception to this was the Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial of 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Prita Meier, "Authenticity and Its Modernist Discontents: The Colonial Encounter and African and Middle Eastern Art History," *Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 14.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Statistics Division, "Composition of macro geographical (continental) regions, geographical sub-regions, and selected economic and other groupings," accessed February 22, 2014, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm#africa>.

<sup>30</sup> I examine the question of African versus Arab identity in Chapter Two. Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, "What exactly does 'sub-Sahara Africa' mean?" *Pambazuka News*, no. 566, January 18, 2012, accessed February 22, 2014, <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/79215>.

<sup>31</sup> Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

subject, curators have, for the most part, left it alone. As artists who participate in identity-themed exhibitions, Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad are well aware of the damaging effects of essentialism.<sup>33</sup> They embed critique within their work, simultaneously challenging and participating in such exhibitions.

In Terry Smith's 2010 article about the place of contemporary art in the discipline of art history, he argued that the entry of non-European art into the west has contributed to the shape of contemporary art as a mode informed by a multitude of geographic and temporal positions.<sup>34</sup> Its emergence is couched within the era of globalization and the concomitant proliferation of the global exhibition, the biennials and large scale exhibitions in which Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad exhibit their work. As curator and art historian Rafal Niemojewski indicates, since the 1989 Havana Biennial, "one of the principle raisons d'être of the contemporary biennial" has been to promote "peripheral art scenes as part of the global circuit."<sup>35</sup> Some, like curator Okwui Enwezor, praise the global exhibition as counter-hegemonic because of its challenge to the historical Euro-centricity of the art world. In contrast (and in response to the essay in which Enwezor posited his argument), critic George Baker argued that the biennial has become a

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Cartwright defined essentialism as a notion that indicates that entities, including humans, shared a set of unchanging, innate and natural characteristics. See Richard L. Cartwright, "Some Remarks on Essentialism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 20 (24 October 1968): 615-626. On the other hand, Jean-Paul Sartre insists that identities are constructions: "We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards." See Jean-Paul Sartre, excerpt from "Existentialism and Humanism", in Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas, New Edition, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 601. Feminists have examined the term, both criticizing it and searching for the possibility that, redefined, essentialism might be politically useful. See Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (New York: Routledge, 1989). Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak put forth the notion of "strategic essentialism," in which she suggested that groups could claim a common identity in order to achieve goals. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern studies: deconstructing historiography," in The Spivak Reader, eds. D. Landry and G. MacLean (London: Routledge, 1996), 214.

<sup>34</sup> Terry Smith, "The State of Art History: Contemporary Art," *Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 2010): 377.

<sup>35</sup> In fact, it was only until the fifth Havana Biennial that Caribbean artists in the diaspora, as in the British Keith Piper, were invited to participate. See Rafal Niemojewski, "Venice or Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial," in The Biennial Reader, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal and Solveig Øvstebø (Bergen: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 95.

wholly westernized enterprise dominated by bourgeois culture.<sup>36</sup> Others join Baker in his critique of the biennial phenomenon, referring to biennials as festivals akin to Disneyland and the world's fairs of the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>37</sup> Biennials, fairs and Disneyland share many attributes, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I highlight the centrality of the display of racial and cultural difference.

In a related point, Smith writes that the entry of non-Euro American artists into the mainstream is an important part of contemporary art, in particular that which is “dedicated to postcolonial critique.” He continues, “its concerns with identity, nationality, and tradition are also shared by artists in exile and in diaspora, as well as by those with critical perspectives working in the centers.”<sup>38</sup> As their engagement with the aftermath of colonialism indicates, Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad fall into this category. However, a consideration of their work solely through this lens misses a great deal. What I show in this dissertation are the ways in which these artists engage another practice that Smith also discusses, an engagement with art histories.<sup>39</sup> In doing so, I show the ways in which their work exemplifies support for Smith's stance: “we should not...subsume these developments under the generalizing distance inherent in the concept of ‘world art,’ nor see them as subject to...[the]...hegemon of ‘global art.’”<sup>40</sup> Using “Arab” art as

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<sup>36</sup> Enwezor's essay was originally published in German: Okwui Enwezor, “Großausstellungen und die Antinomien einer transnationalen globalen Form,” in *Berliner Thyssen Vorlesung zur Ikonologie der Gegenwart*, translated by Tobias Döring, eds. Gottfried Boehm and Horst Bredekamp (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002). In 2004, it was published in slightly edited form in English along with Baker's response to it. See Okwui Enwezor, “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form,” *Documents 23* (Spring 2004): 2-19; George Baker, “The Globalization of the False: A Response to Okwui Enwezor,” *Documents 23* (Spring 2004): 20-25.

<sup>37</sup> This was mostly famously put by art critic Peter Schjeldahl. See Peter Schjeldahl, “Festivalism: Oceans of Fun at the Venice Biennale,” *New Yorker*, July 5, 1999, 85-86. Also see Caroline A. Jones, “Biennial Culture: A Longer History,” in *The Biennial Reader*, 66-87.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, “State of Art History,” 380.

<sup>39</sup> Smith writes that this engagement with art's history “takes art historical definition of what is, and has been, at stake in modernist art to be an important component within what is most at stake in making art now. *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

a case study, this dissertation aims to contribute to the project of clarifying the outline and details of contemporary art.

### **“Others” and self-portraiture**

Starting in the late 19th and early 20th century, art historians began reading art as a reflection of its maker. Art and literature historian Wendy Steiner went so far as to say that “the self-portrait is not a special case but the generic norm.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, art critic and curator Edward Lucie-Smith writes, “every work [an artist] creates, whatever its ostensible theme, is primarily an act of self-revelation and also of self-recognition.”<sup>42</sup> For the purpose of this study, however, I define self-portraiture as an artwork in which the artist makes reference to his or herself, whether visually or via a textual narrative associated with the work. While instances of self-portraiture can be found from as far back as ancient Egypt, the practice boomed in 15th century Europe.<sup>43</sup> Production in the 16th century saw ever-greater increase, a phenomenon art historian Shearer West reads in terms of the rising social status of artists.<sup>44</sup> West outlines the many functions of self-portraiture from this period: self-expression, formal experimentation, as the artist’s signature or advertisement for her skills, the creation of an artistic identity.<sup>45</sup> In some cases, several of these converge, as with Rembrandt’s extended engagement with self-portraits, which he produced between 1609-1669.<sup>46</sup> While self-portraits allowed him opportunity for formal

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<sup>41</sup> Wendy Steiner, “Postmodern Portraits,” *Art Journal* 46, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 173.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Lucie-Smith, “The Self Portrait – A Background,” in *The Self Portrait: A Modern View*, eds. Sean Kelly and Edward Lucie-Smith (London: Sarema Press, 1987), 23.

<sup>43</sup> Lucie-Smith discusses an ancient Egyptian self-portrait dating back to c. 1365 – c.1349/47 BC. *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> West, “Self Portraiture,” 164.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-178. Other suggestions have been made, such as art historian Katherine T. Brown’s argument that some Italian Renaissance artists used self-portraiture as a way to make themselves immortal, to keep a visual record for posterity. Katherine T. Brown, *The Painter’s Reflection: Self Portraiture in Renaissance Venice, 1458-1625* (Florence, Italy: Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki, 2000).

<sup>46</sup> The difficulty of identifying the many copies of Rembrandt’s self-portraits, some of which were produced in his own workshop, brings forth the issue of authenticity, an especially intriguing concept in relationship to the questions

experimentation, they have also been read in terms of how poignantly they revealed both his life circumstances and his interior drama. The reflection on his subjectivity coincided with an interest in the concept of the self in the 17th century.<sup>47</sup> Rembrandt combined “observation and introspection for the exploration of expressiveness,” writes art historian Ernst Gombrich. He goes on:

The intensive self-scrutiny of his mature self-portraits must have shown him precisely this, for here he was the privileged observer who could watch both his mind and his face.<sup>48</sup>

Subsequently, artists explored the interior self in a self-conscious mode that served to position them as artists. Yet despite the many functions of the self-portrait, the desire to read self-portraiture as a reflection of the artist’s sense of self persists.

The literature on portraiture engages ideas that are important for this discussion of self-portraits. The genre of portraiture is defined as a depiction of an actual person, whether or not the sitter is identifiable.<sup>49</sup> Because portraits are often produced from life, the representation is understood as mimetic.<sup>50</sup> However, as art historian Ernst Van Alphen writes, what makes a portrait successful is the degree to which it illustrates the sitter’s interiority, which often has nothing to do with how the person looks. This duality is inherent to portraiture, which simultaneously denotes an actual person while also using artistic conventions.<sup>51</sup>

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of self expression as well as art historical methodology. See Ernst Van De Wetering, “Rembrandt’s self-portraits: problem of authenticity and function,” in A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings IV: Self-Portraits, eds. J. Bruyn, Ernst van de Wetering, Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project, 2005), 89-317. For another expansive study of his self-portraits, see H. Perry Chapman, Rembrandt’s Self-Portraits: A Study in Seventeenth Century Identity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>47</sup> This topic is the focus of a study on Albrecht Dürer. See Joseph Leo Koerner, The Moment of Self-Portraiture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>48</sup> Ernst Hans Gombrich, “On Rembrandt,” in Reflections on the History of Art: Views and Reviews, ed. Richard Woodfield (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 140.

<sup>49</sup> West, Portraiture, 11.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Portraits have also been produced from photographs, drawings, engravings, etc.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Brilliant, Portraiture, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 46-47. Catherine Soussloff terms it the “functional dialectic” of portraiture. Catherine M. Soussloff, The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.

Yet the ways in which portraits signify are even more complicated, for multiple parties and strategies are involved in the production and reading of the works. The sitter “fashions the self,” as art historian Richard Brilliant writes, based on what he wishes to communicate about himself to future generations.<sup>52</sup> As West writes, portraits can act as the sitter’s stand-in, a function especially evident with portraits of leaders.<sup>53</sup> For these reasons, the genre of portraiture can be limiting for artists whose work has the potential to illustrate their uniqueness as artists.<sup>54</sup> And while conventions assist the artist in representing abstract qualities such as power, grace or scholarliness, they do not always coincide with physical likeness. Added to this complex relationship between the sitter and the artist is the viewer, whether a casual museum visitor, a contemporaneous person who knows the sitter personally, an art historian, a citizen, etc. To the project of viewing, each of these parties will bring a unique set of assumptions. Yet as art historian Catherine Soussloff writes, “the expectation of the genre is already given: to recognize” the subject.<sup>55</sup>

It is within this contentious practice of representation and reading—in which there exists a simultaneous expectation of physical resemblance and interior essence that does not always exist—that Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad produce self-portraits. In their work, I note resistance to a reading of their work through the lens of identity, for as art historian and curator Anne Collins Goodyear has written, after the 1960s, “the self-portrait has been repositioned...as a locus for

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<sup>52</sup> Brilliant, Portraiture, 45-88.

<sup>53</sup> West, Portraiture, 43.

<sup>54</sup> Steiner, “Postmodern Portraits,” 173. Brilliant writes that “There is a great difficulty in thinking about pictures, even portraits by great artists, as art and not thinking about them primarily as something else, the person represented.” Brilliant, Portraiture, 23. Soussloff similarly indicates this when she writes that, despite the understanding that the “artist will be most constrained from this freedom in regard to his actions around representations of historically situated people precisely because his is not *free of them*.” Soussloff, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Soussloff, The Subject in Art, 23.

uncertainty and the questioning of long-held assumptions.”<sup>56</sup> Goodyear contextualizes the genre’s transformation within the era of Pop Art, when artists produced art through mechanically reproducible means, the rise of which, as Walter Benjamin wrote in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” threatened the primacy of the original that is brought forth through the physical relationship between the artwork and the artist.<sup>57</sup> Goodyear links this use of reproducible media and its threat to the artwork’s aura to the shift in approach to self-representation. I rely on Goodyear’s expansion of the definition of self-portraiture in this study in order to argue that the artworks I examine, some of which are not traditional self-portraits, offer the artists a way to interrogate assumptions about identity and their role as artists in an increasingly globalized art world. In applying this history to contemporary practices of self-representation among non-EuroAmerican artists, I rely on feminist author and social activist bell hooks’ succinct description of the situation:

the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, *via* exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other’s history through a process of decontextualization...it expand[s] the parameters of cultural production to enable the voice of the non-white Other to be heard by a larger audience even as it denies the specificity of that voice, or as it recoups it for its own use.<sup>58</sup>

It is for this reason that Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad confound readings of their work through the frame of identity, for the superficial evocation of their histories leads to an easy commodification. In response, they incorporate strategies culled from art history, which I read as an institutional critique.

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<sup>56</sup> Anne Collins Goodyear, “Repetition as Reputation: Repositioning the Self-Portrait in the 1960s and Beyond,” in *Reflections/Refractions: Self-Portraits in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Wendy W. Reaves and Anne Collins Goodyear (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2009), 22-23.

<sup>57</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1968), 214-218.

<sup>58</sup> bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” in *Media and Cultural Studies Keywords*, revised edition, eds. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK; and Victoria, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 373.

In the history of art, non-Euro Americans and women have primarily occupied the position of a gendered, racialized and objectified subject in artworks. Often, artists used their own bodies not only to produce self-portraits, but also in performance art or as an iconographic source, thereby subjecting it to a process of re-signification. In response to this occurrence among women artists starting around the late 1960s, art historian Lucy R. Lippard stated that “when women use their own bodies in their art work, they are using their *selves*; a significant psychological factor converts these bodies or faces from object to subject.”<sup>59</sup> In her discussion of Native American artists and self-representation, art critic Jean Fisher argues that an “epistemological crisis” ensues which “exposes the fundamental instability of knowledges that circumscribe the social and political place of colonized people.”<sup>60</sup> Adrian Piper, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez Peña are three examples of artists who have engaged the genre of performance art, conspicuously inserting their bodies into particular places in order to highlight racialized assumptions that underlie histories of disparaging visual and narrative representations. Piper is a philosopher and artist whose mixed African-American and white heritage makes it difficult to “read” race on her body. Because she can pass for white, she often found herself among people who made racist remarks about African Americans unaware of her background. In her *The*

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<sup>59</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, “The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth,” in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976), 124. The European American-dominated Feminist Art Movement was criticized by African American feminists who argued that race and class were important factors in shaping the lives of women of color, a notion that was lost to many early feminist artists. They found themselves in similar positions among those fighting for racial equality, for in those contexts, gender inequality was not treated by the male-dominated movement as an important issue. For early critiques of both the feminist and anti-racism movements, see Toni Cade, ed., *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (New York: New American Library, 1970). Also Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, *All the Women are White. All the Blacks are Men. But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982). To redress exclusion in the feminist art movement, several groups were formed, including “Where We At” Black Women Artists (WWA) in 1971. For a summarized history of WWA, see Valerie Smith, “Abundant Evidence: Black Women Artists of the 1960s and 70s,” in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles, CA, Cambridge, MA and London, England: Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles and MIT Press, 2007), 400-413. Artist Faith Ringgold was an important force in this early moment. See Lisa E. Farrington, *Art on Fire: The Politics of Race and Sex in the Paintings of Faith Ringgold* (New York: Millennium Fine Arts Publishing, 1999).

<sup>60</sup> See Jean Fisher, “In Search of the ‘Inauthentic’: Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art,” *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 44-50.

*Mythic Being* (1972-76) performances (Figure 1.1), Piper transformed herself into a young black male and moved around New York, going to art exhibitions, concerts and plays; taking the bus and subway; and walking the streets at night. As art historian John Bowles indicates, when Piper played the young black man, or when she revealed herself as African American with her *Calling Cards* (1986-1990) (Figure 1.2), her work “manifested unconscious fears of miscegenation and black hypersexuality.”<sup>61</sup>

Nearly two decades later, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez Peña performed *The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992) (Figure 1.3), in which they spent time in a large cage dressed in feathers and loincloths, playing out a narrative of the discovery of a previously unknown people. Because the performance was often staged in exhibition contexts such as museums or fairs, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* tackled the issue of representation and knowledge production about non-EuroAmerican people by bringing what is understood as “traditional” into a “contemporary” context, two seemingly incompatible modes of address.<sup>62</sup> I position Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad’s work within this legacy of artists who critique processes of othering and engage a process of re-signification by taking the authorial reins.

### **Literature Review**

A recurring topic in the discussion of modern art in the Arab world is the question of cultural authenticity in the face of the import of western modes of art making. Wijdan Ali’s *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity* (1997) was the first attempt at writing a history of modern art in the Middle East in English.<sup>63</sup> She associates the decline of Islamic art with the political decline of the Islamic world in the late 19th century, which primed artists to

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<sup>61</sup> John P. Bowles, *Adrian Piper: Race, Gender, and Embodiment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 258.

<sup>62</sup> See Coco Fusco, *English Is Broken Here* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> Wijdan Ali, *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997.

reject their own heritage while embracing western imports. After outlining the development of modern art by country, including Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Sudan, and the Arabian Peninsula, she argues that there are three stages in the development of modern art in the Middle East. The first coincided with the political decline of the region and the rise of European imperialism. At this time, artists were imitating western styles and genres while ignoring their own heritage. In the second stage, artists continued the use of western modes but depicted local themes and subjects, thereby producing art that was relevant to local audiences, albeit in foreign modes of art-making, such as oil painting. In the third, what she terms “the search-for-identity” stage, artists turned to their own heritage, primarily Islamic and pre-Islamic civilizations, to develop their own artistic identity. She particularly highlights what she names the “Calligraphic School of Art,” which she distinguishes from classical calligraphy because of its use of painting and sculpture (i.e., western imports). Nada Shabout’s 2007 book Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics contends that Arab art is an expression of a pan-Arab identity that emerged in response to the political, social, and economic transformations of the region.<sup>64</sup> As does Ali, Shabout argues that modern approaches to the art of the letter, *hurifiyyeh* in Arabic, is a unique contribution to modern art. However, unlike Ali’s historical trajectory of an Islamic art that leads to a modern Islamic art, Shabout insists on a secular Arab identity. She argues that, despite the reliance on European modes of art making, the prominence of aesthetics drawn from Arab heritage makes it a unique movement. Ali and Shabout both offer important accounts of the transformation of Islamic calligraphy into its modern counterpart. Yet their work does not account for the Eurocentric underpinnings the discipline of art history and, in particular, the narrative of modern art. Art

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<sup>64</sup> Nada Shabout, Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007.

historian James Elkins highlights the complexity of writing art histories outside of Europe and the U.S., arguing that the particularities in various countries do not always conform to the discipline's framework.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, the insistence on a uniquely Arab or Islamic art drives the desire for the representation of an authentic identity in art, the reverse of which is an exclusion of that which does not conform.

Others in the field have turned their attention to the project of writing national art histories (rather than the regional focus in Ali and Shabout's books). These attempts have proven fruitful even while national identity, as the authors I examine below contend, is often conceived outside of the nation's physical borders. Kamal Boullata introduces his 2009 book Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present by suggesting the difficulty of writing a national art history because of Palestinian dispersal after 1948.<sup>66</sup> He asserts the existence of an art history in Palestine before the creation of the state of Israel and locates it in the practice of icon painting and studio painting. In his text, 1948 is a moment of rupture that both stymied the development of art and caused people to lose touch with earlier traditions in art. He argues that a chronological Palestinian art history cannot be written because of the population's dispersion. He therefore asserts an alternative form of art history writing by identifying several recurring themes: place, memory, and resistance. In addition, he emphasizes a link between visual and textual imagery, the latter of which dominated in terms of production. In this matter, I rely on Boullata to frame my argument about Al-Ghoussein's engagement with Palestinian iconography. Boullata's text is an innovative approach to writing a national history of art in a context characterized by diaspora,

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<sup>65</sup> See James Elkins, ed., Is Art History Global?, New York; London: Routledge, 2007. Also see Prita Meier, "Authenticity and Its Modernist Discontents: The Colonial Encounter and African and Middle Eastern Art History," *Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 13-46.

<sup>66</sup> Kamal Boullata, Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present, London and San Francisco: Saqi Books, 2009.

exile, occupation, and dispossession. An important aspect of his project is its emphasis on the transgression of national borders.

Similarly, Sarah Rogers writes a history of modern and contemporary Lebanese art. In her unpublished dissertation, “Postwar Art and the Historical Roots of Beirut’s Cosmopolitanism” (2008), she disagrees with the western critics’ assertion that the postwar generation of artists arose out of a historical rupture created by the Lebanese Civil War; instead, she situates them within a history of cosmopolitanism in the port city of Beirut that has run through visual arts since the 19th century.<sup>67</sup> In doing so, her dissertation does several things: she highlights the western desire for an authentic and local art in contexts outside of Europe and the U.S., thereby ignoring the professional and educational relationships that shape artists’ approach to art making; and she proffers a history of Lebanese art that is continuous, yet open enough to account for the formal and conceptual diversity of this history. Rogers’ scholarship is helpful to my project, for it illustrates the role that reception plays in creating and maintaining a limited frame through which art and art histories can be understood. Hers is a model of art history writing that does not conform to the European model. Rather, it is based in local realities, which in the case of Beirut, is international. In this way, she is able to bypass the often-uttered critique that non-EuroAmerican art is derivative.

I find both Boullata and Rogers’ texts helpful because of their emphasis on Palestinian and Lebanese artists’ education and lives outside their countries of origin. In emphasizing these, they point to a history of cross-cultural interaction, which throws into question the search for an authentic artistic expression. They highlight the prominent experience of diaspora and exile, positions which challenge the primacy of the nation-state institution. In focusing on the social

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<sup>67</sup> Sarah Rogers, Postwar Art and the Historical Roots of Beirut’s Cosmopolitanism, Ph.d Dissertation, MIT, 2008, 14.

and political pressures that have influenced art production, they also throw the possibility of identifying formal attributes of an “Arab” art into question.

### **Chapter outline**

In this dissertation, I examine the works of Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Hassan Musa and Walid Raad, in which I locate critiques of the art world’s identity politics. Identity art found a place in the art world in the 1980s when institutions began to take heed of non-European American artists’ insistence on their inclusion in museums, exhibitions and the history of modern and contemporary art. Artists were joined by art historians who took aim at the discipline of art history, in which modern art has been defined as a primarily European and American venture.

In Chapter Two, I examine this history through a discussion of key international exhibitions, and I argue that exhibitions of Arab art emerged from within this context, particularly in exhibitions of contemporary African art. Identity art often took aim at difficult issues such as racism and oppression, thereby situating these artists in a position that highlighted the histories that ensured their peripheral place in the mainstream art world. I link this history to that of the rise of biennials and other international exhibitions, which since the 1989 Havana Biennial have similarly emphasized their position outside of art world “centers.” I end the chapter with an examination of the current build-up of the art world in the Middle East.

With this historical context established, I move on to discuss the work of Al-Ghoussein, Musa, and Raad through the use of a monographic structure. Each artist employs what cultural theorist Laura Marks describes as “screens and ruses” to represent his body and biography, which takes place through reference to the history of art.<sup>68</sup> This occurs through formal means as well as with the concepts the artists use to frame the work. In Chapter Three, I examine self-

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<sup>68</sup> Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 230.

portraits by Hassan Musa, in which the painter plays with the boundaries of the genre by substituting his face and body with those of historical figures, thereby re-writing his narrative by borrowing from others' histories. His self-portraits illustrate a practice that curator Okwui Enwezor has described as "a game of theater and masquerade, premised on the artifice of self-construction."<sup>69</sup> He employs a strategy of appropriation whereby he uses the faces, bodies and stories of historical figures to posit his own identity as one that transgresses cultural, racial and gendered boundaries. *Autoportrait en St. Sebastian* (1997) (Figure 1.4) is a self-portrait that bears no resemblance to Musa. Instead, the head of the Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara is set upon the body of St. Sebastian, appropriating their martyrdom. Just as Guevara and St. Sebastian gave their lives for the revolution and the Christian faith, respectively, Musa posits that he must similarly become a martyr because of his critique of the art world's approach to exhibiting and defining African art, what he terms *ArtAfricanism*.

As I discuss in Chapter Four, Al-Ghoussein's photographs reflect an engagement with the impact of his exile from Palestine, his homeland in which he has never set foot. He figures in each of the photographs, which he describes as a combination of self-portraiture, landscape and performance.<sup>70</sup> This relationship is replete with an ambiguity that is especially obvious in his first series, *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)* (2002-2005) (Figure 1.5, Figure 1.7, Figure 1.8, Figure 4.10, Figure 4.12, Figure 4.13) because of Al-Ghoussein's use of the *keffiyeh*, the black and white scarf associated with Palestine. The *keffiyeh* has a history in which the scarf has gone from being a utilitarian object to one that has come to simultaneously signify both resistance and terrorism in

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<sup>69</sup> Okwui Enwezor, "Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity, A Conceptual Framework," in *Contemporary African Photography from the Walther Collection: Events of the Self, Portraiture and Social Identity* ed. Okwui Enwezor (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2010), 23-28.

<sup>70</sup> Regarding performance, Al-Ghoussein qualifies his engagement with the genre, preferring the term "interventions" over "performance" to describe his process. Tarek Al-Ghoussein, phone interview with the author, Sharjah, UAE, October 11, 2011.

the Palestinian context.<sup>71</sup> Yet in Al-Ghoussein's photographs, the figure does not carry himself with the pointed determination one would expect of a fighter. In each of his series, he explores a particular aspect of his exilic identity—barriers, land, longing, belonging, transience, movement—which I read in combination as a critique of the notion of an incontrovertible relationship between belonging and the nation-state.

In Chapter Five, I examine Walid Raad's first project, *The Atlas Group*, an imaginary foundation that purports to collect and preserve documents about the Civil War in Lebanon, and his second project *Scratching on Things* (2007-present), which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Raad's project of self-representation is not obvious, for it only emerges with a rumor the artist spread in conversations with curators and art historians, including me. He said, "there's a rumor going around that Fadl Fakhouri [the main protagonist in *The Atlas Group*] is my father."<sup>72</sup> In this way, he insinuates a personal connection to the purportedly imaginary stories he tells in his work. I trace this rumor through Raad's references to early 20th century avant-garde artists and their critiques of an increasingly institutionalized art world, as well as through the history of photography and the way our understanding of the medium has developed through the work of artists and writers. In doing so, I highlight Raad's representation of self that is conscious of the art world's tendency to box artists into easy-to-consume identities.

Quite unlike Musa and Al-Ghoussein's projects, where self-portraiture is present but complicated, Raad's engagement with self-portraiture becomes evident only after his belated suggestion—through rumor—that the fictional historian is his father. A little boy appears in the

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<sup>71</sup> Ted Swedenburg examines the history of the *keffiyeh*, arguing that it became a political signifier during the 1936-39 Arab Revolt, during which Palestinian farmers rose up against the British. Later, the late president of the Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat would wear it in reference to the 36-39 revolt and characterize his movement as a popular one. I examine this history to a greater extent in Chapter Four. See Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

<sup>72</sup> Walid Raad, interview by author, New York, NY, April 25, 2008. The rumor was also mentioned in Fereshteh Daftari, *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking*, with an essay by Homi Bhabha and prose by Orhan Pamuk (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 22.

video *Missing Lebanese Wars* (1996) (Figure 1.6), an *Atlas Group* work on which I focus my attention in Chapter Five. However, he is never referred to, nor is it confirmed that he is the historian's son. Instead, he serves to populate the backdrop of a story about the war that is also a backdrop. Raad employs a strategy whereby his self-representation is obscured by layers and layers. Raad's approach to representing his self prevents his subjection to art historical analyses (like this one), which have the potential to objectify trauma, displacement and war. Musa is not so elusive as he unabashedly posits himself as the author in order to counter racialized representations to which African artists are subjected. In contrast, Al-Ghoussein's project illustrates a process of self-representation that similarly does not give an all-access pass to his experience. While his photographs clearly examine the question of identity and exile, the question remains unresolved. Laden with these histories, Musa, Al-Ghoussein and Raad proceed into the world of contemporary art, armed with critical strategies from art history and an understanding of the politics of exhibition practices.

## CHAPTER 2

### From local to global: a short history of exhibitions

In 1976, art critic Brian O’Doherty described the white cube gallery as an ideological device that directs how spectators experience art.<sup>73</sup> He argued that the blank white walls effectively delete the context from which the work was created to simulate a space for visual contemplation, a process that is similarly cut off from context. In this article, O’Doherty identified artists who responded with critiques of this function, Marcel Duchamp in particular. Similarly, I argue that Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad respond to modes of exhibition making, in particular the privileging of identity for non-European American artists. As a dominant trope, the use of identity directs the ways in which audiences experience and understand the work. Art historians Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal and Solveig Øvstebø write that “artworks, at their best, define positions that can contribute to, as much as resolutely resist, the exhibition frames within which we place them.”<sup>74</sup> This is certainly the case with Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad, each of whom engage in this paradox of contemporary art, whereby they participate in exhibitions that frame them according to identity constructs, while simultaneously critiquing this curatorial approach.

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<sup>73</sup> Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica: The Lapis Press, 1986).

<sup>74</sup> Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal and Solveig Øvstebø, “Biennialogy,” in *The Biennial Reader*, 17.

Before I examine the ways in which these artists respond to “exhibition frames” in the following chapters, I offer a brief history of the rise of Arab art, which I position within the context of exhibitions of identity beginning in the late 1980s. I loosely break this history down into three sometimes overlapping moments: 1) the institutional embrace of non-European American and identity art, 2) contemporary African art exhibitions, and 3) the surge of exhibitions focusing on Arab/Muslim/Islamic art after 9/11 and the consequent rise of art institutions in the Middle East.<sup>75</sup> Though curators and artists were already working on promoting Arab art in the U.S., I argue that it made its entry into the global art world most visibly through exhibitions of African art. In particular, curators worked to challenge representations of Africa as homogenous through highlighting the continent’s cultural diversity, which also includes Arabs, Indians and Europeans among many others. These exhibitions are part of the phenomenon of the global exhibition, which includes biennials and other large-scale traveling exhibitions. The international nature of this history reflects an art world in transition, which has moved from a small handful of “centers” in the U.S. and Europe surrounded by the “peripheral” rest of the world to one in which a multiplicity of centers exists. My focus on Arab art and the slippery ways in which Al-Ghoussein, Musa and Raad simultaneously occupy and critique identity framing operates as a case study of this global phenomenon.

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<sup>75</sup> By “identity art,” I refer to a specific practice of focusing on identity by women and artists of color that especially flourished beginning in the 1960s. Several art movements such as the Feminist Art Movement and the Chicano Art Movement centered on identity as a way to reclaim the right to represent the self. These were often tied to politically activism. See Carlos Francisco Jackson, *Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtestArte*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009; Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., London: Thames & Hudson, 2012. Artists involved in these movements strove to focus on and celebrate difference, which has proven to be a tricky project.

## The institutional embrace of identity art

The paintings, photographs, videos and mixed media works I examine in this dissertation were produced between the mid-1990s and the present. I read them within a historical context characterized by the institutional embrace of political art and identity art produced by non-European American artists in the U.S. and Europe, and the art world's subsequent "global turn," which was precipitated by the international proliferation of biennials in the 1990s.<sup>76</sup> The focus on identity in art challenged the idea of autonomous art, a concept promoted by the influential formalist art critic Clement Greenberg in the 1950s. Instead artists turned to the everyday for material, both literal and conceptual. In the case of artists of non-European descent in the U.S., their "everyday" was often informed by racial violence, exclusion, migration and diaspora, among other influences. As I discussed in the previous chapter, because women and people of color filled museums as the subjects of artworks rather than their authors, a focus on identity was an important strategy in the project of self-representation.<sup>77</sup> In the process, artists' critical explorations of social realities and histories such as colonialism, racism and migration were brought into the realm of mainstream art for the first time.

The 1984 MoMA exhibition entitled *'Primitivism' in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (from here on referred to as *Primitivism*) well exemplified the dominant attitudes about non-European American art and artists. Organized by curator William Rubin and art historian Kirk Varnedoe, *Primitivism* paired western modern artworks alongside African and

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<sup>76</sup> A special issue of *Art Journal* focused on the global turn and identity art. See *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005). Also see Jill H. Casid and Aruna D'Souza, *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> This process was complicated by Roland Barthes' concept of the death of the author, through which he sought to highlight the importance role of the reader (or audience) in determining meaning. The problem with this notion is that the author "died" just when those who were previously excluded (women and people of non-European descent) started authoring texts. Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, selected and translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-8. For a feminist critique of Barthes, see Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

Oceanic ones that shared formal affinities. Rubin stated his aims in the catalogue essay: “I want to understand the Primitive sculptures in terms of the Western context in which modern artists ‘discovered’ them.”<sup>78</sup> His statement indicated a disregard for the ways in which these objects functioned and were valued in the cultures from which they derived. What replaced this was consideration from a strictly formal standpoint, far and away from their social and historical contexts. Despite the scare quotes, his use of the trope of discovery suggests a colonial mindset, whereby people and their cultures are seen as raw materials or resources.

The exhibition came under vehement attack, most prominently by anthropologist James Clifford and art critic Thomas McEvilley. McEvilley argued that the exhibition was an attempt to prove the superiority of classical modernist art and promote the idea that “formalist Modernism will never pass” by relating its forms to what were deemed universal values embodied by “primitive art.”<sup>79</sup> Non-European American and women artists had been producing artworks and exhibitions that were critical of the perspective evidenced by *Primitivism* since the 1960s.<sup>80</sup> However, it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that major institutions started to take note of these works in force, in part because of the response to attitudes exemplified by *Primitivism*. The furor it caused was a turning point for how people came to think about the issue of racial and cultural representation. As art historian Jack Flam wrote, “the voices of peoples

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<sup>78</sup> William Rubin, “Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction,” in *‘Primitivism’ in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, vol. 1, ed. William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 1. “Primitive art” has been characterized as childlike in its seeming lack of formal training. Primitive art is thought to embody universal values, an idea based on the belief that people who produce this work are doing so by accessing something innately human that is overridden once he is socialized and civilized. See G. H. Luquet, *L’Art Primitif* (Paris: G. Doin & Cie, 1930). Also see Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, “Primitive,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 217-233.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas McEvilley, “Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief,” *Artforum* 23 (November 1984): 54-60. For James Clifford’s critique, see See James Clifford, “Histories of the Tribal and the Modern,” *Art in America* 73 (April 1985): 164-215. McEvilley’s biting review of the exhibition spurred an exchange of letters between Rubin, Varnedoe and himself, which were printed in *Artforum* from late 1984 to 1985.

<sup>80</sup> An early example is the 1976 exhibit *Women Artists: 1550 – 1950*, organized by Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris. See Chadwick, “Feminist Art in North America and Great Britain,” in *Women, Art, and Society*, 355- 377.

who for the past eighty years had been considered ‘mute’ were suddenly being listened to quite carefully.”<sup>81</sup>

One year after *Primitivism* opened, the newly appointed director of the Paris Biennale Jean-Hubert Martin began to conceive of an exhibition that he believed would counter the Eurocentricity of the MoMA show.<sup>82</sup> *Magiciens de la Terre* opened in 1989 at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle of the Parc de la Villette, displaying fifty artists from Europe and the United States and fifty from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Australia.<sup>83</sup> Hailed as the first truly global exhibition, it nonetheless posed many problems for which it was heavily critiqued, in particular because it maintained the use of a primitive framing of non-western artists. In an interview with art historian Benjamin Buchloh, Martin spoke of exhibiting the artists without hierarchy. However, Martin’s selection of works by African, Asian and Latin American artists perpetuated attitudes similar to those expressed by Rubin in *Primitivism*. In contrast to the contemporary art of the European-American artists, Martin chose “traditional” works by the “others,” such as Navajo sand painting, a Tibetan mandala or an Ijele mask from Nigeria, as well as artists from the “peripheries” but living in the west. In an attempt to distinguish his project from Rubin’s, Martin highlighted Rubin’s emphasis on form, which he contrasted with his interest in function, particularly in spirituality or “magic,” as he described it.<sup>84</sup> Yet by invoking the theme of magic, Martin, like Rubin, reflective a perspective prevalent during the colonial period in which the native was seen as governed by laws of spirituality and nature versus the

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<sup>81</sup> Jack Flam, in Introduction to *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, eds. Jack Flam with Miriam Deutch (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), 18-19.

<sup>82</sup> Martin was initially working to replace the format of the Paris Biennale. See Benjamin Buchloh, “The Whole Earth Show: An Interview with Jean-Hubert Martin,” *Art in America* 77, no. 5 (May 1989): 150.

<sup>83</sup> The exhibition ran from 18 May to 14 August 1989. See Jean-Hubert Martin et. al., *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1989).

<sup>84</sup> In his interview with Martin, Buchloh suggested that the exhibition similarly treat “magic” as it transpired in the US and Europe, “the fetishization of the sign, in spectacle culture and in commodity fetishism.” Buchloh, “Whole Earth,” 156.

European's tendency towards logic.<sup>85</sup> Buchloh read this interest in non-western spirituality as “a highly problematic vision of the ‘other,’ conceived in terms of ‘primitivism’ because of the lack of consideration of everyday concerns.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, Martin chose the non-western works based on his own “artistic intuition,” thereby ignoring the context from which the works came.<sup>87</sup> Despite Martin's objections, he revealed a striking affinity with Rubins' method when he indicated that his selection process would be subjective in his use of “artistic intuition...according to my own history and my own sensibility.”<sup>88</sup>

Critiques of the exhibition came from a wide array of perspectives and positions. Because the blockbuster exhibition was set to coincide with France's bicentennial, art historian Johanne Lamoureux compared the exhibition to a display that took place one hundred years earlier, the 1889 Exposition Universelle.<sup>89</sup> The Exposition served to illustrate France's might through displays of culture from France's colonial holdings.<sup>90</sup> At the fair, visitors had the opportunity to dip in and out of foreign cultures from around the world via live tableaux that were constructed using pillaged architecture and imported people.<sup>91</sup> In contrast, displays of France emphasized

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<sup>85</sup> Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed., *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Malden, MA and Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

<sup>86</sup> Buchloh, “Whole Earth,” 155.

<sup>87</sup> Martin told Buchloh that “since we are dealing with objects of visual and sensual experience, let's really look at them from the perspective of our own culture. I want to play the role of someone who uses artistic intuition alone to select these object which come from totally different cultures.” Buchloh, “Whole Earth,” 152-153.

<sup>88</sup> Buchloh, “Whole Earth,” 152-153.

<sup>89</sup> Johanne Lamoureux, “From Form to Platform: The Politics of Representation and the Representation of Politics,” *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 68-71. For a discussion of the 1889 Paris world's fair, see Deborah L. Silverman, “The 1889 Exhibition: The Crisis of Bourgeois Individualism,” *Oppositions* 8 (Spring 1977): 70-91.

<sup>90</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “The World as Exhibition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (April 1989): 217-36. Also Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 64-68.

<sup>91</sup> This was so in *Rue du Caire*, the Egyptian exhibition in which visitors could enjoy dancing girls and hookah smoking in architectural structures made authentic through the use of facades that were removed from buildings in Cairo and shipped to Paris expressly for use in the fair. See Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Sociologist Tony Bennett describes the “exhibitionary complex” of world's fairs, a “technology of vision...served to regulate” the crowd, a process that gave the rural poor and working class the impression of power through their ability to gaze upon people on display without realization that the crowd itself was “the ultimate spectacle.” Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” *New Formations* 4 (1988): 85.

technological advancement, the pinnacle of which was the Eiffel Tower. Lamoureux suggests that, just as France's self-representation posited a stark contrast to those of its colonies and other non-Europeans, so did Martin associate Europe with the modern and the non-westerners with unchanging tradition. The participating artist Rasheed Araeen lambasted the exhibition with a similar critique: Martin's selection of contemporary art from the western context and "traditional" or folk art from the "other" contexts revealed an assumption that "Western culture alone has passed from one historical period to another."<sup>92</sup> He indicated that in Martin's search for the "authentic," the curator ignored the fact that "the other" had long since "entered into the citadel of Modernism and has challenged it on its own ground."<sup>93</sup> Other artists, like the American Barbara Kruger, critiqued the premise of the exhibition in her work commissioned for *Magiciens*. Kruger hung a panel at the entrance of one of the exhibition venues, which read "Who are the magicians of the earth?" answering with a list of various professions, thereby dismantling the notion of magic upon which the exhibition was premised (Figure 2.1).<sup>94</sup> Writing much later, Hassan Musa wrote that exhibitions like *Magiciens* were "political manifestations in which aesthetics are 'remixed' with anthropology, and where the world is ethnicized in equal parts

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<sup>92</sup> Rasheed Araeen, "Our Bauhaus Others' Mudhouse," *Third Text* 3, no. 6 (Spring 1989): 3-16. This article appeared in a special edition of *Third Text* devoted solely to *Magiciens*. Art critic Geeta Kapur took issue with the binary that the exhibition set up between the indigenous and the avant-garde, the first of which entailed "timeless consanguinity" while the latter possessed "individual agency." See Geeta Kapur, "Curating in Heterogeneous Worlds," in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, 178-191, eds. Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 178.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. According to Lucy Lippard, however, this was nothing new. She made the claim that "feminism's greatest contribution to the future of art has probably been precisely its *lack* of contribution to modernism." See Lucy R. Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s," in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 171, 172. Cornelia Butler summed up feminist art's contribution to the field in referring to the "fact that it seldom cohered, formally or critically, into a movement the way Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, or even Fluxus did." Cornelia Butler, "Art and Feminism: An Ideology of Shifting Criteria," in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles, CA, Cambridge, MA and London, England: Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles and MIT Press, 2007), 15.

<sup>94</sup> Kruger answered, "Doctors? Politicians? Plumbers? Writers? Arms Merchants? Farmers? Movie Stars? Accountants? Artists? Secretaries? Soldiers? Tribal Chieftans? Beauticians? Priests? Computer Programmers? Journalists? Nuclear Physicists? Drug Dealers? T.V. Personalities? Mothers? Homeless People? Mathematicians? Nurses? Taxi Drivers? Linguists? Spies? Nuns? Lawyers?" See Allen S. Weiss, *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 58.

among Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas, etc.”<sup>95</sup> In addition to the problems arising from the approach to representing works by non-European Americans, curator and researcher Clémentine Deliss stated that the exhibition “managed to misrepresent issues at the heart of a lot the Western art it included by regressing further into a retinal mode of appreciation.”<sup>96</sup> In hindsight, however, the row that ensued has illustrated the significance of *Magiciens*, for it prompted the questioning of art history and its Eurocentric underpinnings and challenged dominant curatorial modes of display.<sup>97</sup>

*Magiciens* and *Primitivism* revealed the entrenched Eurocentricity of the mainstream art world. Set in stark contrast, the Third Havana Biennial opened a few months after *Magiciens* with a decidedly more courageous set of concerns.<sup>98</sup> The biennial was inaugurated in 1984 by then Cuban president Fidel Castro, whose politics suffused it with an anti-imperialist ideology.<sup>99</sup> It was the first recurring large-scale exhibition of art from the so-called Third World, focusing solely on artists from Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and Africa to the exclusion of the art world centers. This was an unprecedented movement to promote those relegated to the art

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<sup>95</sup> Hassan Musa, “Ghosts of Africa in Europe’s Museums,” translated by Maria Moreno, *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture* 2 (Spring 2008): 22.

<sup>96</sup> Clémentine Deliss, “Free Fall – Freeze Frame: Africa, exhibitions, artists,” in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 201.

<sup>97</sup> Owing to this, *Magiciens* was examined in one of a series of books published by Afterall Books, which examines historically significant exhibitions. See Lucy Steeds et. al., *Making Art Global (Part 2): Magiciens de la Terre 1989* (London: Afterall Books in association with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2013).

<sup>98</sup> The *Havana Biennial* took place from 1 November to 31 December 1989 in Havana, Cuba.

<sup>99</sup> Rachel Weiss positions the Havana Biennial within the local political context, writing that it came out of the 1970s, a “repressive period of extreme conformity to the Soviet model” that prompted the punishment of intellectuals and artists critical of the regime. Combined with the Mariel exodus in 1980, when over a period of six months, approximately 125,000 Cubans left for the U.S., this proved an embarrassment for Castro. The biennial was to provide the regime with a way to recover its international reputation. Rachel Weiss, “A Certain Place and a Certain Time: The Third Bienal de La Habana and the Origins of the Global Exhibition,” in *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall Books in association with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2011), 8.

world's peripheries.<sup>100</sup> The biennial incorporated a number of firsts that have since been appropriated by subsequent biennials: exhibitions were organized around a curatorial theme, thereby abandoning the use of national pavilions; it did away with the practice of awarding prizes; it integrated a major international conference, taking the first steps in transforming biennials into spaces of knowledge production.<sup>101</sup> Beginning in 1987 with the second Havana Biennial, it introduced a regulation whereby only art produced within the past five years would be shown, the first official manifestation that biennials privilege the most contemporary works. Artists were invited to Havana to install their works, and in the fifth edition, 104 of the 171 participants were present for the process. Additionally, the biennial was highly inclusive with participants ranging from emerging to established artists, crafts people and even children who invented toys.<sup>102</sup> Chair of the Arts Administration Program at the Art Institute of Chicago, Rachel Weiss writes that the biennial was a political project proclaiming the aims of newly independent countries, the so-called Third World.<sup>103</sup> This complicated project was made even more difficult by the diversity of the histories, not only of Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, but their constituent nations. Therefore, Weiss writes, the biennial “raised important questions not only about the nature of art made outside the Western market system, but also about its relationship with that system,” i.e., “questions of culture and power.”<sup>104</sup>

Culture and power were issues of concern outside of Havana, as evidenced by three contemporaneous art exhibitions in New York and London: *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists*

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<sup>100</sup> In fact, it was only until the fifth Havana Biennial when Caribbean artists in the diaspora, as in the British Keith Piper, were invited to participate. See Rafal Niemojewski, “Venice or Havana,” 95.

<sup>101</sup> Weiss, “Certain,” 14.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>103</sup> Though the term “Third World” was used by these nations as part of political project, in its use in the west, it became a “racial designation” that homogenizes a diverse set of histories today and makes its usage problematic. Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 18.

*in Post-War Britain* (London, 1989);<sup>105</sup> *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s* (New York, 1990); and the Whitney Biennial (New York, 1993). Similar to the Havana Biennial, the exhibits focused on non-European American artists, many of whom resided in the U.S. and Europe. While lauded for an approach that contextualized the work within particular histories, all of the exhibitions were also derided as presenting what was variously described as “bad” or confrontational art. Araeen, a participating artist in *Magiciens*, curated *The Other Story* with a double intent: to present artists from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean living in the U.K. who had long been producing modern art and engaging with its discourses; and to argue that their exclusion from the modernist narrative was due to institutional racism.<sup>106</sup> When it opened, both supporters and detractors lodged critique. In the *Sunday Times*, for example, art critic Brian Sewell wrote that the artists were “not good enough. They borrow all and contribute nothing.”<sup>107</sup> He went on to argue that such exhibitions were mounted to present black artists at the expense of showing good work. In other words, the artists’ identities mattered more than the quality of the art. Perhaps due to Araeen’s accusatory and confrontational stance, art critic Peter Fuller wrote that Araeen imitated western artists and reduced his politics to “hysterical polemics.”<sup>108</sup> Even those sympathetic to Araeen’s perspective took issue. Cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha, for example, derided his paltry inclusion of women.<sup>109</sup> In hindsight, however, the exhibition has been hailed as significant to the history of modern British art. In 2010, *The Other Story* was reconsidered in an exhibition called *A Missing History: ‘The Other Story’ Re-visited* held at the

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<sup>105</sup> Curated by Rasheed Araeen, the exhibition was on view at the Hayward Gallery from 29 November 1989 to 4 February 1990, the Wolverhampton Art Gallery from March 10-April 22, 1990, and the Manchester City Art Gallery and Cornerhouse from May 5-June 10, 1990.

<sup>106</sup> Rasheed Araeen, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain* (London: South Bank Centre, 1989), 5.

<sup>107</sup> Brian Sewell, “Pride or Prejudice,” *Sunday Times*, Nov. 26, 1989, 8. Sewell would go on to negatively critique other exhibitions, including *Africa Remix*. See Chapter Three for my discussion of this review.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Fuller, “Black Artists: Don’t Forget Europe,” *Sunday Telegraph*, Dec. 10, 1989, 10.

<sup>109</sup> Homi Bhabha, *Art And Its Histories* (London: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 1999), 270. Out of the twenty four exhibiting artists, only four (Sonia Boyce, Mona Hatoum, Lubaina Himid and Kumiko Shimizu) were women.

Aicon Gallery in London.<sup>110</sup> Gallery director Niru Ratnam claimed that the controversy surrounding the original exhibition distracted from the content: black participation in British modernist art history. Ratnam was not alone in recognizing its importance. As art critic Jean Fisher puts it, *The Other Story* was an important step in the process of “‘de-imperializing’ the institutional mind.”<sup>111</sup>

Perhaps indicative of this institutional change was *The Decade Show*. Conceived of collaboratively among three institutions—the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (MOCHA), The New Museum of Contemporary Art and The Studio Museum in Harlem—it featured the work of mainly U.S. artists, most of whom examined the issue of identity from the position of the gendered, racial and/or cultural “other.” The exhibition responded to multiculturalism, an ideology that meant to remedy dominant patterns of representation that marginalized people of color through a celebration of cultural difference.<sup>112</sup> The exhibition was notable for a number of reasons. First, it offered three otherwise ailing museums entry into the contemporary art limelight via political art.<sup>113</sup> Second, it was dominated by women and people of color, artists who

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<sup>110</sup> The exhibition ran from 30 June to 24 July 2010.

<sup>111</sup> Jean Fisher, “The Other Story and the Past Imperfect,” *Tate Papers* 12 (2009), accessed January 26, 2012, <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7273>.

<sup>112</sup> Multiculturalism was critiqued for its tendency to highlight so called positive aspects of cultures in a process that decontextualized through an omission of historical specificity. Kobena Mercer is one among many who have critiqued the ways in which black artists in the diaspora in the 1980s and early 1990s were made to perform their otherness. See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 25-74. For critiques of multiculturalism see J. Waldron, “Superseding Historic Injustice,” *Ethics* 103, no. 1: 4-28; Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Samuel Scheffler, “Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism,” in *Boundaries and Allegiances: Problems of Justice and Responsibility in Liberal Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>113</sup> Reviewer Kay Larson wrote that “the New Museum has often been victimized by a certain political and ideological narrowness. MOCHA has had a hard time getting noticed...The Studio Museum, located on 125<sup>th</sup> Street in the center of Harlem, is a long train ride away from the galleries, a ride that isn’t made easier by the bleak temper of race relations in the city.” Kay Larson, “Three’s Company,” *New York Magazine*, June 11, 1990, 84.

had historically been excluded.<sup>114</sup> Third, the works were of an activist and political nature.<sup>115</sup> It was similar to the Whitney Biennial in that it responded to the turbulent decade of the 1980s in and beyond the United States, and the artists dealt with serious issues—AIDS, homelessness, racial violence, gender oppression, unemployment and the shrinking middle class.<sup>116</sup> For example, in James Luna's *Artifact Piece* (1990), a sand-filled vitrine evidenced the artist's missing body in a museum display (Figure 2.2). This work was originally conceived of as a performance at the San Diego Museum of Man in 1987, when Luna lay in a museum vitrine dressed in a loincloth with didactic labels explaining his physical attributes (Figure 2.3). One explained the origins of a scar, which he got during a drunken bar fight. This prior work critiqued the prevalent practice in natural history museums of exhibiting Native Americans and their cultures. Juxtaposed alongside dinosaur bones and displays of prehistoric man, such representations suggest the extinction of Native American people and situate their cultures in an imaginary and romanticized past far from contemporary realities.<sup>117</sup> The performance played on stereotypes while also pointing to

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<sup>114</sup> See Amei Wallach, "On the Outside, Looking in The Decade Show is extraordinary art from the excluded of our society," *Newsday*, July 22, 1990, 17; G.V. Blanc, "When You Think Of Mexico, Latin-American Women in the Decade Show," *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 8 (April 1990): 17-18; C. Reid, "Inside/Outside + The Decade-Show Organized by 3 New-York Museums Focuses on 80s Work by a Diverse Group of Artists," *Art in America* 79, no. 1 (January 1991): 57.

<sup>115</sup> Owing to its political and activist undertones, the exhibition was the subject of a special issue of *Visual Arts Research*, in which art education, activism and multiculturalism were examined. See Peter Smith, "Multiculturalism's Therapeutic Imperative," *Visual Arts Research* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 55-60; Mary Wyrick, "Collaborative AIDS Art and Activism: Content for Multicultural Art Education," *Visual Arts Research* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 44-54.

<sup>116</sup> Writing about the art of the 1980s, curator Helen Molesworth attempted to reframe art from the period, arguing that it reflected artists' struggle to reflect their experience in an increasingly commodified world. See Helen Molesworth, "This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s," in *This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s* (Chicago and New Haven: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2012), 14-46.

<sup>117</sup> In response to community pressure, the Museum of Natural History at the University of Michigan removed fourteen dioramas that depicted Native American people in miniature performing prosaic "traditional" tasks in January 2010. See Jasmine Zhu, "Natural History Museum removes dioramas amidst controversy," *The Michigan Daily*, September 14, 2009, accessed July 20, 2012, <http://www.michigandaily.com/content/natural-history-museum-removes-dioramas-amidst-controversy>.

problems in Luna's community.<sup>118</sup> Luna's work is illustrative of the politically and socially inclined art featured in *The Decade Show*, which was hailed for bringing artists from backgrounds otherwise normally excluded from the museum.

*The Decade Show* paved the road for the exhibition of art that centered on pressing contemporary social issues.<sup>119</sup> Three years later, the Whitney Museum of American Art mounted its *Whitney Biennial* (1993), quickly nicknamed the "multicultural" Biennial. As with *The Decade Show*, the majority of artists shown were women and people of color, many of whom were not well known. But unlike *The Decade Show*, the *Whitney Biennial* came under heavy attack, as evidenced by review titles. Robert Hughes called it a "festival of whining."<sup>120</sup> Hilton Kramer titled his review "The Biennialized Whitney: Closed for Destruction."<sup>121</sup> Michael Kimmelman wrote, "at the Whitney, Sound, Fury and Little Else."<sup>122</sup> Referencing the majority of people of color and women artists, Peter Plagens wrote that the Biennial was "as close as a museum can get to a Salon of the Other without becoming an outsider art festival."<sup>123</sup> One of the few positive reviews came from Roberta Smith, who called it a "watershed" in particular because

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<sup>118</sup> Jean Fisher discusses the "epistemological crisis" that ensues when Native American artists create meaning rather than carry meaning assigned to them. See Jean Fisher, "In Search of the 'Inauthentic': Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art," *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 44-50.

<sup>119</sup> Arts education specialists Doug Blandy and Kristin G. Congdon wrote that it was time to move on from art exhibitions as "places where one escapes from daily life, falling into some kind of detached aesthetic experience of pure enjoyment." Doug Blandy and Kristin G. Congdon, "A Theoretical Structure for Educational Partnerships and Curatorial Practices," *Visual Arts Research* 19, no. 2 (38) (Fall 1993): 66.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Hughes, "The Whitney Biennial: A Fiesta of Whining," *Time Magazine*, Monday 22, 1993, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,978001,00.html>.

<sup>121</sup> Hilton Kramer, "The Biennialized Whitney: Closed for Destruction," *The New York Observer*, March 29, 1993, 1, 19.

<sup>122</sup> Michael Kimmelman, "At the Whitney, Sound, Fury and Little Else," *New York Times*, April 25, 1993, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/04/25/arts/art-view-at-the-whitney-sound-fury-and-little-else.html>.

<sup>123</sup> Peter Plagens, "Fade from White: The Whitney Biennial Gives Center Stage to women, Gays and Artists of Color," *Newsweek*, March 10, 1993, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.newsweek.com/fade-white-191204>.

the exhibition focused on artists' attempts to grapple with contemporary social crises around "race, class, gender, sexuality, the AIDS crisis, imperialism and poverty."<sup>124</sup>

Supporters and detractors responded alike to its confrontational stance, illustrative of which was a work by Pat Ward Williams. Her 8-by-16-foot photographic mural of five African-American men from 1992, upon which was spray painted the words "What You Lookn At" (Figure 2.4), was often cited in reviews. Still, many who supported the so-called political turn in art took issue with the exhibition. Thomas McEvelley stated that it seemed to "preach to the converted, and runs the risk of provoking the unconverted to renewed hostility rather than attempting to sway them through argument and dialogue."<sup>125</sup> Art critic Eleanor Heartney wrote that the exhibition seemed to suggest "white male power elite as the source of all evil."<sup>126</sup>

Some of the Biennial's most vehement critics focused on the issue of content versus form, such as art historian Hal Foster, who identified a "turning away from questions of representation to iconographies of content; a certain turn from a politics of the signifier to a politics of the signified."<sup>127</sup> He echoed philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto, whose critique focused on the curatorial decision to exhibit the amateur video that portrayed the police beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles in 1992. Danto wrote that, despite the lessons taught by Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, not everything can be "art."<sup>128</sup> He took issue with the lack of "integrity and

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<sup>124</sup> Roberta Smith, "At The Whitney, A Biennial With A Social Conscience," *New York Times*, 5 March 1993, accessed July 19, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/05/arts/at-the-whitney-a-biennial-with-a-social-conscience.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas McEvelley, "Same Difference," *Artforum* 31 (May 1993): 14.

<sup>126</sup> See Eleanor Heartney, "Report from New York: Identity Politics at the Whitney," *Art in America* 81 (May 1993): 44. Heartney did point to pieces that offered powerful representations of the experience of exclusion, including Glenn Ligon's *Notes on The Margin of the Black Book* (1993) and Charles Ray's *Family Romance* (1993), now in the Guggenheim and MoMA permanent collections, respectively.

<sup>127</sup> Hal Foster brought this issue up in a round table discussion about the Biennial. See Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Silvia Kolbowski, Miwon Kwon, and Benjamin Buchloh, "The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial," *October* 66 (Autumn 1993): 3.

<sup>128</sup> Arthur Coleman Danto, "The 1993 Whitney Biennial" *The Nation* 19 (April 1993): 533.

coherence” of the works, which he argued emphasized the message over the concept and form.<sup>129</sup> In contrast, other critics like Kim Levin and sociologist Steven C. Dubin highlighted the urgency with which artists were producing work, with Levin going so far as to say that art could no longer “afford to be autonomous” and was instead tending to “urgent social purposes.”<sup>130</sup>

High-profile exhibitions like *The Other Story*, *The Decade Show* and the 1993 Whitney Biennial were exemplary of changes in the art world, an opening up to artists previously excluded or relegated to the margins. Around the same time, a small number of curators and scholars worked to promote art by artists in the Middle East. Salwa Mikdadi is an art historian who immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1970s. She is most well-known in the U.S. for curating the exhibit *Forces of Change: Artists from the Arab World*, a 1994 traveling exhibition on view for over one year.<sup>131</sup> As the exhibition was co-produced by the National Museum for Women in the Arts (NMWA) in Washington, D.C., it focused on women artists. However, in Mikdadi’s telling of the history that led to the exhibition, she is clear to state that she never had a sole interest in women artists.<sup>132</sup> For nearly twenty years prior to the exhibition, she had worked tirelessly to promote Arab art and culture more generally, in large part by presenting the work of Arab artists to museums, galleries, and other art institutions in New York.<sup>133</sup> She was consistently rejected by the Eurocentric art world, both on the east coast and in the San Francisco

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Kim Levin, “Identity Crisis Update: The End of Modernism and the Issue of Cultural Identity,” in Strategies for Survival – Now! A Global Perspective on Ethnicity, Body and Breakdown of Artists Systems, ed. Christian Chambert (Swedish Art Critics Association Press, 1995), 206. Also see Steven C. Dubin, Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>131</sup> *Forces of Change* was exhibited at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. from February 1993 to May 1994; Dudley House, Lehman Hall, Harvard University from May to June 1994; Wolfson Gallery and Central Gallery, Miami Dade College from January to February 1995; and Gwinett Fine Arts Center from March to May 1995. See Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi et al., Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World (Lafayette, CA: International Council for Women in the Arts; Washington, D.C.: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1994).

<sup>132</sup> The information presented here is drawn from an interview with Salwa Mikdadi. Salwa Mikdadi, Skype interview with the author, April 21, 2014. (Mikdadi has since dropped “Nashashibi” from her professional name.)

<sup>133</sup> She funded these trips.

Bay Area, where she was living. When the opportunity came to curate an exhibition of contemporary art from the Arab world, she took it, embarking on field research in sixteen countries, fundraising, writing, even hand carrying many of the art works back to the U.S.

The exhibition reviews of *Forces of Change* are telling, for though Mikdadi was explicit in her exclusion of art works about the veil or other issues that stemmed from Orientalist views about women and gender in the Middle East, this was exactly the direction journalists took in their reviews. For example, reviewer Amy Schwartz wrote that the “common ground” that linked the artists from the fifteen countries featured in the exhibition “is not the widespread popular image of a veiled, silenced and put-upon female population” but “a lively attempt to knit modern, often abstract art out of the rich and double-edged traditions of the long Middle Eastern cultural past.”<sup>134</sup> Though she does refer to the actual substance of the exhibit in the second half of the sentence, the review title, “Not Veils, but Voices,” sets up a binary bolstered by an association between veiling and the inability to speak. Other reviews went so far as to append the name of the exhibition to highlight the focus on women.<sup>135</sup> Alan Artner at the *Chicago Tribune*, however, reflected one of Mikdadi’s main concerns, that the work’s value would best be understood when contextualized within the art worlds from which they came.<sup>136</sup>

This may perhaps be the most challenging aspect of introducing U.S. and European audiences to modern and contemporary art produced outside their borders, for when it is judged according to a history written about and from the perspective of the west, much is lost. This is

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<sup>134</sup> Amy Schwartz, “Not Veils, But Voices,” *The Washington Post*, February 19, 1994, A27. The title of the review presupposes that veiling is forced upon women.

<sup>135</sup> For example, Ian Williams, “Forces of Change: Women Artists of the Arab World,” *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 12, no. 6 (March 1994): 49; Margaret Maree, “Art exhibit sends cultural messages; Arab women’s works will be in spotlight starting Wednesday,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 11, 1995, J1. In the latter, the exhibition is titled “Forces of Change: Women Artists of the Arab World.”

<sup>136</sup> Alan G. Artner, “Exhibit puts cultural differences on display,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1994, 80.

why Mikdadi says: “The U.S. is not ready for Arab art. And you can quote me.”<sup>137</sup> With little background on art histories in the Middle East, reviewers take another route and contextualize it within a political and social frame. The back story behind *Forces of Change* offers an interesting case study through which to consider the conflicting desires and intentions of curators, audiences and institutions. In fact, though the focus on women would set a precedent followed by many exhibitions of Arab art, *Forces of Change* aimed to expose audiences to art from the Middle East and the central role women played in its production and promotion.<sup>138</sup> As Mikdadi explains, the title *Forces of Change* refers to women’s engagement with social and political change, and even issues concerning the environment.<sup>139</sup>

Still, exhibitions that would follow framed the art within narratives that derived from narrowly defined assumptions about the Arab world, as with *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, a 2003 exhibition produced by Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts) in London. The exhibition sought to highlight the complexity of veiling practices and its representation in contemporary art, thereby “challenging any single or fixed cultural interpretation.”<sup>140</sup> Despite the desire of the exhibition organizers to explore histories and responses to veiling, the focus on the veil limits consideration to women. Anthropologist Jessica Winegar considers the western interest in Arab women artists who focus on gender related issues such as sexuality or the veil in the Middle East and argues that it reveals a paternalistic posturing against a seemingly misogynist Middle East.<sup>141</sup> This is not to argue against the need for

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<sup>137</sup> Salwa Mikdadi, Skype interview with the author.

<sup>138</sup> In the catalog preface, Mikdadi highlights the work of women artists in several countries, particularly the establishment of art and cultural organizations. Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi, *Forces of Change*, 9-11.

<sup>139</sup> Salwa Mikdadi, Skype interview.

<sup>140</sup> Iniva, “Veil: Introduction,” accessed April 7, 2014, [http://www.iniva.org/exhibitions\\_projects/2003/veil/veil\\_introduction](http://www.iniva.org/exhibitions_projects/2003/veil/veil_introduction).

<sup>141</sup> Jessica Winegar, “The Humanity Game: Art, Islam and the War on Terror,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 668-671. Also see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

discussion about these issues, but to highlight the difficulty in engaging a conversation about issues in a situation where both sides have already made up their minds. Today, the art world has evolved some, and there are fewer exhibitions that focus on Arab women in particular. While the first artists from the Arab world to enter the mainstream art world's consciousness were women, today the percentage between men and women is more balanced, evidencing a shift in reference and interpretation that Mikdadi has attributed to the internationalization of contemporary art. The difference, she says, is that in the 1990s, Arab artists dealt primarily with local traditions and histories. Today, these artists appropriate and reference from the western history of modern art, applying it to their own contexts. This dissertation examines this development to argue that interpretive frames are most useful when they take into consideration the artists' use of formal and conceptual strategies.

### **Contemporary African art and its players**

On March 4, 2014, artist and art historian Olu Oguibe participated in a round table at the California College of Art in San Francisco in which he, South African artists Vaughn Sadie and Kemang Wa Lehulere, and curator Dominic Willson discussed the second (and last) Johannesburg Biennial, subtitled *Trade Routes: History and Geography* (1997), which set the stage for exhibitions of art by artists outside the U.S. and Europe. Unlike the first Johannesburg Biennial, the second edition excluded craft in favor of a focus on contemporary African art, thereby introducing the mainstream art world to African artists conversant in the language of contemporary art.<sup>142</sup> The biennial exhibited contemporary art from all over the world, prompting

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<sup>142</sup> Sabine Marschall, "The Impact of the Two Johannesburg Biennials," in [The Biennial Reader](#), 459.

curator Dan Cameron to write that “global art has finally passed from pipe dream to the paradigm of our times.”<sup>143</sup>

The story of the biennial is part of a larger history, whose protagonists include (but are not limited to) Oguibe, curator Okwui Enwezor, and art historian Salah Hassan. Enwezor is the most visible of the three. Five years after the Johannesburg Biennial, he was artistic director of documenta 11 and has recently been appointed curator of the 2015 Venice Biennial. Hassan is Associate Chair and Professor of Art History at Cornell University.<sup>144</sup> Oguibe is professor of Art and African-American Studies at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. During the roundtable, Oguibe told the story of his relationship to Enwezor and their goals for contemporary African art in the 1990s: rather than wait for the art world’s doors to open, they engaged in the project of installing their “own doors.”<sup>145</sup> Their efforts yielded several significant platforms: a journal called *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, several large-scale and high profile exhibitions of contemporary African art and the publication of some widely disseminated articles and books, such as *Unpacking Europe: Towards a Critical Reading* and *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to Marketplace*.<sup>146</sup> Inflected by highbrow intellectualism, Oguibe, Enwezor and Hassan’s positioning of contemporary African art stood in stark contrast to a dominant perspective: that it was traditional craft produced by anonymous figures for spiritual purposes. In contrast, they featured artists well versed in the idiom of contemporary art practices. They also targeted the idea of pan-Africanism, best illustrated by the concept of Négritude, a

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<sup>143</sup> Dan Cameron, “Glocal Warming,” *Artforum International* 36, no. 4 (December 1997): 17.

<sup>144</sup> Hassan also writes about Hassan Musa. See Chapter Three.

<sup>145</sup> Olu Oguibe, roundtable with Olu Oguibe, Kemang Wa Lehulere, and Vaughn Sadie, California College of the Arts, San Francisco, CA, March 14, 2014.

<sup>146</sup> Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi, eds., *Unpacking Europe: Towards a Critical Reading* (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, NAI Publishers, 2001); Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor, *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to Marketplace* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

literary and artistic philosophy based on the notion of a unified African culture.<sup>147</sup> Their conceptual and curatorial strategies incorporated postcolonial theory, emphasizing the concepts of hybrid and diasporic identities. This approach enabled them to challenge the notion of an authentic African identity through reliance on Stuart Hall, who as I show in the introduction to this dissertation, argues that identity entails an evolving process, rather than an incontrovertible place of origin or final resting point.

The argument that Africa is a place of great diversity played an important role in introducing the mainstream art world to Arab artists. While Arab identity on the African continent takes on different forms, Oguibe calls attention to the binary approach typically used to define the relationship, referring to “the racio-geographic delineation” of African and Arab, which he indicates “is to place the Arab a notch above The African on the scale of cultural evolution.”<sup>148</sup> He argues that the attempt to distinguish between African and Arab ignores “the long history of Arab-Negro interaction, together with all the subtleties and ambiguities of racial translations...” He continues, saying it “equally ignores internal disparities within the so-called ‘African’ cultures.”<sup>149</sup> Because of this attempt to assert a hierarchy between Arab and African, the topic of Arab identity in Africa is fraught and complex. Islam came to Africa as early as 639 via the Byzantine city of Alexandria in present-day Egypt.<sup>150</sup> As it spread from North Africa to the area south of the Sahara, from the great lakes region in the east to the River Congo in the

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<sup>147</sup> I discuss the concept of Négritude in Chapter Three.

<sup>148</sup> Oguibe, The Culture Game, 6.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> M. El Fasi and I. Hrbek, “The coming of Islam and the expansion of the Muslim empire,” in General History of Africa: Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century, eds. M. El Fasi and I. Hrbek, vol. 3 (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1988), 70. El Fasi and Hrbek write that part of the reason why Islam spread so rapidly was due to the “financial and military exhaustion of both [the Byzantine and Sassanian] empires.” Additionally, due to oppressive taxation and persecution, the subjects of these empires were not opposed to a change in the ruling classes. Ibid.

west, “Africa imparted its own stamp on Islam,” historian Djibril Tamsir Niane writes.<sup>151</sup>

Throughout Africa’s vast geography, this manifested in the blending of local traditions and practices with Islamic beliefs.<sup>152</sup> Additionally, Islamization was not necessarily coincidental with Arabization.

This is not the place to discuss this issue of Islam and Arabization in the whole of Africa, for its geographic and historical reach is long. However, it is useful to consider the case of Sudan, not only because Hassan Musa was born and raised there, but also because it illustrates the futility of defining the identity categories of “African” and “Arab” in black-and-white terms. Arabization and Islamization in Sudan took place gradually over the centuries, beginning with Arab Muslim nomads in the early Islamic period and accelerating with the fall of the Christian kingdoms in Nubia in the 14th century. The rise of the Muslim Funj sultanate in north-central Sudan in the 16th century had the effect of consolidating Arab and Muslim identity in western present-day Sudan.<sup>153</sup> The name “Sudan” derived from the Arabic word “sud,” meaning black, which was used by early Arabs to describe the area south of the Sahara Desert from present day Senegal to Ethiopia: *bilad al Sudan*, or “land of the blacks.” As historian Heather Sharkey writes, in the late 19th century, to be Arab was to be Muslim, an identity category that connoted high

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<sup>151</sup> D.T. Niane, “Introduction,” in General History of Africa: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century, ed. D.T. Niane, vol. 6 (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1984), 2. This is not to say that the spread of Islam was completely peaceful, for the reasons for its spread was primarily political. However, there was no attempt to forcibly convert non-Muslims, though political and social structures implemented by Muslims rulers created a situation that prompted many to convert.

<sup>152</sup> See Raymond Aaron Silverman, “History, Art and Assimilation: The Impact of Islam on Akan Material Culture” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1983).

<sup>153</sup> For the early history of Islam in Sudan, see Yusuf Fadl Hasan, The Arabs and the Sudan, from the Seventh to the Early Sixteenth Century (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967); R. S. O’Fahey and J. L. Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan (London: Methuen, 1974); Jay Spaulding, The Heroic Age in Sinnar (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1985); Neil McHugh, Holy Men on the Nile: The making of an Arab-Islamic Community in the Nilotic Sudan, 1500–1850 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994). For an examination of Islamic culture in the later period, see Lidwien Kapteijns, Mahdist Faith and Sudanic Tradition: History of Dar Masalit, 1870–1930 (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984); and Janet J. Ewald, Soldiers, Traders, and Slaves: State formation and economic transformation in the Greater Nile Valley, 1700–1885 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

status.<sup>154</sup> Coupled with an entrenched history of slavery which “bestowed servile connotations on the adjective Sudanese (*sudani* in Arabic),” a racial hierarchy developed.<sup>155</sup> Though slavery was largely abolished, the hierarchies remained and were even reinforced via the British policies of colonial education, which favored high-status males who identified as Arab. These were the men who would eventually take on government posts in post-colonial Sudan and implement the policy of Arabization for two reasons: to undo divisive British colonial policies and to increase the cultural capital of Arabs, who ruled Sudan as a minority group.<sup>156</sup>

However, while Arabic was increasingly becoming the lingua franca, the policy of Arabization backfired. Especially in the south and west of Sudan, citizens rebelled against the Khartoum-based government in the north, which had a monopoly on power and wealth. Because of the government’s pro-Arab policies-its preference for the Arab north and country-wide attempts at Arabization-the problems in Sudan, which have largely centered around resources and power, have become oversimplified as a fight against “Arabs” and “Africans.” According to political scientist Mahmood Mamdani, “Arab” in Sudan has had several meanings. Locally, Arab was a pejorative reference to the lifestyle of the nomad as uncouth. Regionally, it referred to someone whose primary language was Arabic. In this sense, a group could become “Arab” over time. This process, known as *Arabization*, was not an anomaly in the region: there was Amharization in Ethiopia and Swahilization on the East African coast. The third meaning of Arab was “privileged and exclusive”; it was the claim of the riverian political aristocracy who

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<sup>154</sup> The process and means by which one could claim an Arab identity in Sudan has shifted through time. In the late 19th century in the northern region of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Arabness was associated with Muslims who claimed an Arab genealogy. Conversely, in the 1990s, the linguist B. G. Nyombe suggested that Arabness could be accessed through conversion to Islam and the adoption of an Arabic name, thereby dismissing genealogy and reflecting the idealism of the 1960s and 1970s, during which time intellectuals saw Sudanese identity as both Arab and African. See B.G.V. Nyombe, “The politics of language, culture, religion and race in the Sudan,” *Frankfurter Afrikanistische Blätter* 6 (1994): 10.

<sup>155</sup> Heather J. Sharkey, “Arab Identity and Ideology in Sudan; The Politics of Language, Ethnicity, and Race,” *African Affairs* 107, no. 426, (2008): 29.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

had ruled Sudan since independence, and who equated Arabization with the spread of civilization and being Arab with descent.”<sup>157</sup> Despite this complex history of identity formation in Sudan, Mamdani argues that American responses to the brutal violence in Darfur (the western region of Sudan) flattens the histories of, and relationships between, the many ethnic and cultural groups in Sudan by positing “Arabs” as the perpetrators and “Africans” as the victims.<sup>158</sup>

The first exhibition that explicitly posited Africa in culturally diverse terms, ignoring this artificial African-Arab division was *Authentic/Ex-Centric: Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art*, an exhibition curated by Hassan and Oguibe for the African pavilion of the 2001 Venice Biennale.<sup>159</sup> Two artists of Algerian descent, Rachid Koraïchi and Zineb Sedira (Sedira was born in France), were exhibited alongside the Afro-Cuban Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, the Afrikaner Willem Boshoff, the mixed South African Berni Searle, British-Nigerian Yinka Shonibare, and the Ghanaian Godfried Donkor. The intent to illustrate a culturally diverse Africa, to the extent that the curators shifted focus to the diaspora with Campos-Pons and Shonibare, is clear. In fact, several of the works in the exhibition examine histories of racial and cultural mixing, thereby confounding the desire to locate an authentic African identity. One example is Berni Searle’s two-projector video installation *Snow White* (2001) (Figure 2.5). In it, the nude artist sits on the floor making a type of Indian bread called *roti* as flour falls from above in a process that whitens her brown skin. Art historian Annie E. Coombes reads the video in terms of

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<sup>157</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, “The Politics of Naming: Genocide, Civil War, Insurgency,” in *Darfur and the Crisis of Governance in Sudan: A Critical Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 149. For a discussion of the difference between Arabization and Islamization in Sudan, see Ali A. Mazrui, “Africa and Other Civilizations: Conquest and Counter-Conquest,” in *Africa in World Politics: The African State System in Flux* (John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild, eds., Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 114-116.

<sup>158</sup> Mamdani, “Politics,” 145. For a more extensive discussion of identity in the context of the history of violence that has plagued Darfur, see Alex de Waal, “Who are the Darfurians? Arab and African Identities, Violence, and the External Engagement,” in *Darfur and the Crisis*, 125-144.

<sup>159</sup> *Authentic/Ex-centric* exhibited in the Palazzo Fondazione Levi at the 49th Venice Biennale from 8 June to 30 September 2001. See Salah Hassan and Olu Oguibe, eds., *Authentic/Ex-Centric: Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art* (New York: Forum for African Arts, 2001).

Searle's mixed-race background.<sup>160</sup> Like Searle's video, the work in *Authentic/Ex-Centric* examined fraught issues such as gender, colonialism, exile and tradition. However, the focus on social issues did not occur at the expense of quality. Though the exhibition's "hard to find off-site" venue meant that it did not get much attention, when it was reviewed, it was well received.<sup>161</sup> Former *Art in America* editor Marcia Vetrocq described it as "one of the most satisfying" of the exhibitions outside of the two principal venues and discussed each of the artworks in her ten-page review of the biennale.<sup>162</sup> Reviewer Lynn MacRitchie focused her review of the Biennial solely on *Authentic/Ex-Centric*, referring to it as the "most interesting" exhibition at Venice that year.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, this was no dead-end exhibit, as each of the artists in the exhibition continue to produce art and exhibit.

As *Authentic/Ex-Centric*'s subtitle "Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art" suggests, the curators intended to carve a space for African artists in the history of modernism. In the introduction, Hassan and Oguibe argue that conceptualism links contemporary and "classical" African art, particularly because of the "preeminence of idea over form" in both practices.<sup>164</sup> Pointing to the philosophical debate about the nature of art, they lean on an expanded definition of the concept to envelop other practices.<sup>165</sup> At the same time, they insist on situating conceptual art in Africa as part of a global phenomenon. Their argument evidences a desire to both highlight a practice with local roots alongside artists' engagement with

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<sup>160</sup> Annie Coombes, "Skin Deep/Bodies of Evidence: The Work of Berni Searle," in *Authentic/Ex-centric: Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art*, 178-201.

<sup>161</sup> Marla C. Berns, "Africa at the Venice Biennale," *African Arts* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 1.

<sup>162</sup> Marcia E. Vetrocq, "Biennale Babylon," *Art in America* 89, no. 9 (September 2001): 113-114.

<sup>163</sup> Lynn MacRitchie, "Out of African Into the limelight: Visual Arts Venice: A show on the Biennale fringe allows the quality of work by African artists to speak for itself, says Lynn MacRitchie," *Financial Times*, July 22, 2001, 16.

<sup>164</sup> Salah M. Hassan and Olu Oguibe, "Authentic/Ex-Centric: Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art," in *Authentic/Ex-centric*, 10-15, quoted text on 15.

<sup>165</sup> They write: "it is questionable whether a work of art must be intended to reflect or meditate on the subject of art in order to qualify as conceptual art, as opposed to merely incorporating this element or tendency even without clear intention, or as an inherent in the very nature of art." Hassan and Oguibe, "Authentic/Ex-centric," 11.

contemporary art practices associated with the west. Art historian Elizabeth Harney finds contradiction in this, particularly by reading a 2004 article by Oguibe, in which he argues that, rather than find a space within the history of modernism, practitioners should highlight its Eurocentric exclusivity.<sup>166</sup>

In my view, the project of critique and history writing are not mutually exclusive. Couched in the context of the cultural turn, both essays exemplify the work of art historians who strove to disprove the notion that non-European American art histories were derivative and lagged behind their European counterparts, in part by writing these histories. Art historian Prita Meier reads the work of these art historians as a “revolutionary transgression” against colonialism, which is nevertheless launched via the discourse of modernism.<sup>167</sup> Hassan argued that the use of “modern” as a concept to describe contemporary practices in Africa is most illustrative of artists whose work “entails a self-conscious attempt to break with the past and a search for new forms of expressions.”<sup>168</sup> Meier’s scholarship highlights the complexity of the work of defining modern African and Middle Eastern practices while using language derived from the very discipline that has excluded it. However, Musa makes the political stakes of this project clear with his declaration that “the whole European cultural tradition is a war booty in which I situate myself as a legitimate heir to all the human cultural fortune that the European tradition could encompass, including non-European traditions.”<sup>169</sup>

Though *Authentic/Ex-Centric* did not explicitly set out to explore the complex

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<sup>166</sup> Elizabeth Harney, “Canon fodder,” *Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 120-127. For Oguibe’s text, see Olu Oguibe, “The True Location of Ernest Mancoba’s Modernism,” *Third Text* 19, no. 4 (2005): 419.

<sup>167</sup> Prita Meier, “Authenticity and Its Modernist Discontents: The Colonial Encounter and African and Middle Eastern Art History,” *Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 15.

<sup>168</sup> Salah M. Hassan, “The Modernist Experience in African Art: Visual Expressions of the Self and Cross-Cultural Aesthetics,” in *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, ed. Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor (London; Institute of International Visual Arts; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 223.

<sup>169</sup> Hassan Musa, “El Botí de Guerra Occidental,” in *Occident vist des d’Orient* (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 2005), 147. Translation by Musa provided to the author.

relationship between “Arab” and “African” or the associated North and Sub-Saharan regions, Hassan sought to justify the inclusion of North Africans in a letter from the editor during his tenure at *Nka*.<sup>170</sup> He indicated that the typical conception of North Africa in relation to the Mediterranean, Islam, and Christianity obfuscates the histories of North African interactions with the rest of the continent. In contrast, he argues, “the reality of both these divides are hybrid and mixed and, for the most part, are produced through the mobility of people, goods, commodities, and cultural products.”<sup>171</sup> Other large-scale traveling exhibitions of contemporary African art, such as *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora* (curated by Laurie Ann Farrell) and *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* (curated and directed by Simon Njami), followed suit with the inclusion of North African artists.<sup>172</sup> In both, works by North Africans Zineb Sedira and Rachid Koraïchi, Ghada Amer, Yto Barrada, and Lara Baladi, among others, were exhibited. Yet, like *Authentic/Ex-Centric*, neither dealt explicitly with the overlapping relationship between Arab and African identity.

The year *Authentic/Ex-Centric* opened, an event of epic proportion took place. Two airplanes flew into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, a third into the Pentagon, and a fourth crashed in an open field in Western Pennsylvania. The event spurred on U.S. President George W. Bush’s “War on Terror,” spawning the degradation of First Amendment rights in the U.S. with the signing in of the Patriot Act.<sup>173</sup> Throughout the U.S. and abroad, Arabs, Muslims

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<sup>170</sup> Hassan Musa figured centrally in one of the catalog essays. See Salah Hassan, “Insertions: Self and Other in Contemporary African Art,” in Hassan and Oguibe, eds., *Authentic/Ex-centric*, 26-49, in particular page 42.

<sup>171</sup> Salah M. Hassan, “From the Editor,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 24 (2001): 4.

<sup>172</sup> Laurie Ann Farrell, Valentijn Byvanck and Museum for African Art, *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora* (New York: Museum for African Art, 2004); Simon Njami, *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, with essays by Lucy Durán et. al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz; New York: D.A.P., 2005).

<sup>173</sup> The Patriot Act broadened law enforcement agencies’ rights to gather information about citizens and non-citizens in the U.S., increased the authority to regulate financial transactions, and enabled law and immigration authorities to detain and deport people to a greater extent than ever before. For a critique of the Patriot Act, see Susan N. Herman,

and even those who looked Arab were subjected to racial profiling and hate crimes.<sup>174</sup> In the art world, 9/11 had a surprising impact.

### **Exhibitions of Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim/Islamic art after 9/11**

As this brief history has shown, Arab art was not an unknown in the west. It is impossible to predict the direction Arab art would have taken if had 9/11 never happened, but the successes of artists like the Palestinians Mona Hatoum and Emily Jacir, for example, suggest that the U.S. and Europe were ripe for it.<sup>175</sup> However, 9/11 indelibly altered the landscape. While media analyst Jack Shaheen shows that the image of the villainous Arab is a stereotype that predates 2001, the attacks renewed the image with vigor.<sup>176</sup> The media was filled with images of Arabs and Muslims as violent and dangerous religious fanatics, prompting a wave of hate crimes and general distrust. Anthropologist Nadine Naber argues that after the 9/11 attacks on the US in 2001, the identity categories “Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim” were collapsed, thereby “consolidat[ing] the racialization of the category.”<sup>177</sup> In the title of this section, I append the consolidation by adding “Islamic” to reference the curatorial framing of contemporary artists from the Middle East in relationship to the art historical category of Islamic art, a topic I discuss further later in this chapter.

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Taking Liberties: The War on Terror and the Erosion of American Democracy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>174</sup> For a discussion of the localization of the war on terror in the context of the San Francisco Bay Area, see Nadine Naber, “Look, Mohammed the Terrorist is Coming!: Cultural Racism, Nation-Based Racism, and the Intersectionality of Oppressions after 9/11” in Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects, eds. Amaney A. Jamal and Nadine C. Naber (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 276-304.

<sup>175</sup> By 1994, for example, Hatoum had a solo exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and the much-younger Jacir participated in the group exhibition “Greater New York” at MoMA P.S.1. in 2000.

<sup>176</sup> Jack G. Shaheen, Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People, revised and updated edition (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2009).

<sup>177</sup> Nadine C. Naber, “Arab American and US Racial Formations,” in Race and Arab Americans, 2.

Anthropologist Jessica Winegar writes that many people working in the sectors of art and culture were keen on rectifying the vilification of the “Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim.”

Evidencing the central role that culture plays in this process, Winegar writes that the number of Middle Eastern art, music and cultural events increased after 9/11.<sup>178</sup> She attributes this increase to the belief that art offers “supreme evidence of a people’s humanity.”<sup>179</sup> According to ideas stemming from both enlightenment and modernism, art is a universal language that thereby bridges disparate cultures. By highlighting Middle Eastern art, “liberal American cultural elites” presented certain Middle Easterners very differently from the brutish terrorist figure.<sup>180</sup> While organizers often have the best intentions, Winegar argues that such events nonetheless perpetuate the good Muslim/bad Muslim dichotomy. This is so because the kind of art and music most typically promoted “corresponds to the government’s paternalistic civilizing mission.”<sup>181</sup>

While I do not suggest that the rise of Middle Eastern art stems solely from the context Winegar describes, it seems not only to have sped the process, but has also proven a difficult situation to ignore. Tinged with the project of representing the Middle East and its diverse

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<sup>178</sup> Winegar, “Humanity.”

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 652. Related to this is curator Mari Carmen Ramírez’ 1996 positioning of curators of non-European American art as “cultural brokers” whose responsibility it is to elucidate how “traditionally subordinate or peripheral groups or emerging communities convey notions of identity.” Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Brokering Identities: Art Curators and the Politics of Cultural Representation,” in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 21-38. Terry Smith similarly highlighted this shift in the curator’s role, pointing to figures like the French Catherine David, whose work with Lebanese artists brought them to international attention and Okwui Enwezor in the case of African art. Smith, “State of Art History,” 377.

<sup>180</sup> Bush set the dichotomous stage on 20 September 2001 when he stated, “either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.” His oft-repeated declaration cast the attacks in an oversimplified framework that ignored the history. Mahmood Mamdani discussed 9/11 within a historical context, specifically the end of the Cold War, and the ensuing “clash of civilizations.” Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, Doubleday, 2005). For Bush quote, see Michael Hirsch, “Bush and the World: The Need for a new Wilsonianism,” *Foreign Affairs*, 81, no. 5 (September/October 2002): 18-43. The “clash of civilizations” is an idea put forth by Samuel Huntington, whose view of the post-Cold War world be characterized by a struggle between the Judeo-Christian and Muslim worlds. See Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22-49.

<sup>181</sup> Winegar identifies three types of art and music that is typically shown: North African Rai, which is wrongly assumed to be critical of Islam, women visual artists who (again) critique Islam, and Sufi music, which is seen as the embodiment of a moderate Islam. Winegar, “Humanity,” 666.

constituents in contrast to dominant stereotypes—terrorist, misogynist men, oppressed women, fanatical, backwards—the project of exhibiting art from the Middle East and its diasporas after 9/11 is dominated by this discourse. At the same time, successful auctions of modern and contemporary art from the Middle East have revealed it as a financially fruitful pursuit, which in large part drives exhibition practices.<sup>182</sup> Artists like Al-Ghoussein, Musa, and Raad must find ways to produce and exhibit work amidst these formidable pressures.

*Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking*, a 2006 exhibition at the MoMA in New York, exemplified the potential problems that may arise from such a dynamic.<sup>183</sup> Curator Fereshteh Daftari approached exhibition-making using a traditional model, whereby the curatorial framework addresses issues in the discipline of art history. As I mention in Chapter One, attempts to write a history of art from the Middle East that asserts a connection between contemporary and Islamic art have fallen short. She attempts to illustrate this in her essay “Islamic or Not,” in which she considers the relationship between the art in the exhibition and art forms categorized as “Islamic,” including calligraphy, manuscript painting, and carpet weaving, as well as spirituality and identity, evidencing the prevalence of this theme in readings of non-EuroAmerican art. Her essay couches each of the artists within one of these themes, a process that often bypasses more salient topics in the work. For example, she uses identity to frame her discussion of the work of Palestinian artist Emily Jacir and Iranian graphic artist Marjane Satrapi. Daftari’s argument is weakest here, for the issues that are central to the work, exile in the Palestinian context and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, are sidelined in favor of a more placid approach.

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<sup>182</sup> Ramírez, “Brokering Identities.”

<sup>183</sup> *Without Boundary* was exhibited at the New York Museum of Modern art from 26 February to 22 May 2006. See Fereshteh Daftari, *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006). Walid Raad’s work was exhibited at *Without Boundary*.

The exhibition's disengagement with politics was at the crux of several reviews of *Without Boundaries*. Though Daftari admits that the term "Islamic" is "loaded with political and religious subtexts," the exhibition depoliticized the work rather than deal with these subtexts.<sup>184</sup> Several participating artists, including Iranian photographer and video artist Shirin Neshat and Emily Jacir, launched this critique.<sup>185</sup> As Neshat explained,

for some of us, our art is interconnected to the development of our personal lives, which have been controlled and defined by politics and governments. Some artists, including Marjane Satrapi and myself, are "exiled" from our country because of the problematic and controversial nature of our work.<sup>186</sup>

Many reviewers, such as curator Pryle Behman, took issue with the universalizing strokes evident in the exhibition.<sup>187</sup> Edward Said writes that universalism, the notion that some concepts and values are universally held, is problematic because it eradicates historical, political and social specificities, thereby diminishing critiques otherwise evident in the work.<sup>188</sup>

Anthropologist Roland Kapferer argued that the use of "outdated" theories that position the idea of hybrid identity in opposition to authenticity evidenced a detachment from the contemporary realities in the Middle East, in particular the U.S. led wars in Afghanistan (2001-present) and Iraq (2003-2011).<sup>189</sup> He uses the example of sectarian violence in the Iraq war to critique Daftari's attempt to highlight commonalities among communities.

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<sup>184</sup> Daftari, *Without Boundary*, 10.

<sup>185</sup> Tyler Green, "MoMA Keeps the Walls Clean; Islamic Show Sans Politics," *The New York Observer*, 3 April 2006, accessed March 20, 2012, <http://observer.com/2006/04/moma-keeps-the-walls-clean-islamic-show-sans-politics/>.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Jessica Winegar offers also finds the use of universalizing rhetoric problematic. See Winegar, "Humanities," 652. Pryle Behman, "Here, There and Elsewhere," *Art Monthly*, no. 298 (July/August 2006): 1. Raymond Silverman launches a similar critique of the Arab American National Museum. Raymond Silverman, "Arab American National Museum," *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 3 (December 2006): 821-5.

<sup>188</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

<sup>189</sup> Roland Kapferer, "Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking," *Frieze* no. 99 (May 2006), accessed July 26, 2012, [http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/without\\_boundary\\_seventeen\\_ways\\_of\\_looking/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/without_boundary_seventeen_ways_of_looking/).

While U.S. attention to modern and contemporary art from the Middle East seems to ebb and flow, in the region it is steadily growing with the growth of local initiatives. An important player in the field is the non-profit government organization Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF) in the United Arab Emirates, which falls under the emirate of Sharjah's Department of Culture and Information.<sup>190</sup> Founded in 2009, SAF's largest project is the Sharjah Biennial, but it also produces smaller exhibitions, organizes a yearly art conference called the March Meeting, and offers a competitive grant for artists called the Production Programme. The biennial was inaugurated in 1993 by a group of Emirati artists and culture workers and had a regional focus.

In 2003, H.H. Sheikha Hoor Al-Qasimi, the daughter of Sharjah's leader H.H. Sheikh bin Mohamed Al-Qasimi, took over the reins and changed the biennial considerably.<sup>191</sup> Only 23 years old at the time, Al-Qasimi managed to transform the regionally focused Venice-modeled biennial of national pavilions to one organized around a curatorial theme. She also shifted focus beyond the Middle East by bringing on curators who worked in a more international arena. With its schedule coinciding with Art Dubai, Sharjah sees a large influx of artists, curators, collectors and others during what is unofficially referred to as "March Madness." Al-Qasimi's interest in maintaining and developing relationships internationally is evidenced not only by her choice of curators (Yuko Hasegawa, chief curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo in 2013, and Eugenia Joo, director of Art and Cultural Programs at Instituto Inhotim in Brumadinho, Brazil, for 2015), but also by her position on the boards of MoMA PS1, Ashkal Alwan in Beirut, the newly founded International Biennial Association, and on the selection committee for the

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<sup>190</sup> I worked at Sharjah Art Foundation from September 2010 until April 2013, first as the assistant curator to Suzanne Cotter during Sharjah Biennial 10 (2011), then as the coordinator of the grant and artist in residency program. For Sharjah Biennial 11 (2013), I produced a performance installation by artist Wael Shawky.

<sup>191</sup> Al-Qasimi graduated from Slade School of Fine Art with a BFA in 2002, received a Diploma in Painting at the Royal Academy of Arts in 2005, and obtained an MA in Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of London in 2008.

2012 Berlin Biennial. Her influence in the art world is increasing, as shown by her rise to number 48 in 2013 (from 100 in 2003) on *ArtReview*'s Power 100 list.<sup>192</sup>

Al-Qasimi's efforts have worked to establish Sharjah's place in the global arena through the biennial, conference, and grants. In Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, another approach is under way: museum building, particularly the Louvre and the Solomon R. Guggenheim. In the nearby country of Qatar, another government initiative, Mathaf Arab Museum of Art, opened in 2010, boasting a collection of over 6,000 art works of modern art from the Middle East and beyond.<sup>193</sup> Its impressive exhibition line up for 2014 includes solo exhibitions for established artists Mona Hatoum and Etel Adnan, alongside emerging artists such as Magdi Mostafa.

Given the large oil reserves in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, these well-funded government initiatives have become a magnet for those working in the field of Middle Eastern art. However, other countries in the Middle East are similarly engaged in the arts. In Palestine, several organizations, including Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art (founded 1998) and Al Hoash (founded 2004) in Jerusalem, have mounted exhibitions of art.<sup>194</sup> In the West Bank city of Ramallah, the International Academy of Art Palestine (founded in 2006) has engaged internationally exhibiting artists in the instruction of art. In 2012, the first Qalandiya International biennial (QI) opened, as a collaboration among several Palestinian institutions whose aim is to exhibit contemporary Palestinian and international art and highlight traditional Palestinian architecture, which is constantly under threat of demolition.<sup>195</sup> In 2015, the

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<sup>192</sup> "Sheikha Hoor Al-Qasimi," *Artreview*, accessed March 24, 2014, [http://artreview.com/power\\_100/sheikha\\_hoor\\_al-qasimi/](http://artreview.com/power_100/sheikha_hoor_al-qasimi/).

<sup>193</sup> I discuss museums in Abu Dhabi and Qatar at greater length in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

<sup>194</sup> Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, "Current Events," accessed March 24, 2014, <http://www.almamalfoundation.org/>; Al Hoash Gallery, "Al Hoash," accessed March 24, 2014, <http://www.alhoashgallery.org/>.

<sup>195</sup> The participating organizations include Riwaq, Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, A.M. Qattan Foundation, Palestine Art Court – Al Hoash, International Art Academy Palestine, Sakakini Cultural Center and the

Palestinian Museum will open under the direction of Jack Persekian, a member of the QI's curatorial committee, director of Al Ma'mal, and former director of Sharjah Art Foundation.<sup>196</sup> Though the museum's focus is on culture and identity, Persekian's long-time work with contemporary art will inevitably suffuse the project. In Jordan, Darat Al Funun—The Khalid Shoman Foundation is headed by founder and president Suha Shoman, who is also an artist.<sup>197</sup> Since 1993, Darat has hosted exhibitions, artist talks, festivals and residencies for researchers and artists, and he also publishes books. In Egypt, Townhouse Gallery in Cairo has proven a hub of artistic activity under the direction of William Wells, offering workshops and artist residencies, hosting exhibitions, and housing a library.<sup>198</sup> New organizations like Beirut (also in Cairo); and MASS Alexandria, an educational initiative run by artist Wael Shawky in Alexandria, indicate the growing drive to plug Egypt further into the network of international art.<sup>199</sup>

While artists and culture workers from Palestine, Egypt, and Jordan have helped to bring art from the Middle East to the international scene, Lebanon has garnered the most international attention. Sarah Rogers describes the development of cultural institutions in Beirut in the early 1990s, including The Beirut Theater, Ashkal Alwan, The Ayloul Festival, and the Arab Image Foundation.<sup>200</sup> In addition, she highlights the fact that the most well known Lebanese artists—unofficially referred to as the postwar generation—studied abroad during the Civil War. Their practices are inflected with theoretical and formal language associated with contemporary art. By applying these strategies to work that dealt with the context of Beirut, these artists brought local concerns and histories to the art world's attention. Additionally, many returned to live in Beirut

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House of Culture Arts Nazareth. See "About," *Qalandiya International*, accessed March 24, 2014 <http://www.qalandiyainternational.org/?q=about..>

<sup>196</sup> The Palestinian Museum, "About," accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.palmuseum.org/about/the-museum->

<sup>197</sup> Darat Al Funun, "Darat Al Funun," accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.daratafunun.org/>.

<sup>198</sup> Townhouse Gallery, "Townhouse," accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.thetownhousegallery.com/>.

<sup>199</sup> Beirut Beirut, "About," accessed December 7, 2013, <http://beirutbeirut.org/about.html>. MASS Alexandria, "MASS Alexandria," accessed December 7, 2013, <http://massalexandria.wordpress.com/>

<sup>200</sup> Rogers, "Postwar Art."

and took up positions in universities and arts organizations, thereby “localiz[ing] and institutionaliz[ing]” these “seemingly global positions and practices” and passing on their art-making strategies to younger artists.<sup>201</sup> French curator Catherine David’s inclusion of some of these artists in documenta X (1997) and her 2002 book *Tamáss: Contemporary Arab Representations: Beirut/Lebanon* contributed to the increasing attention cast onto art production in Lebanon.<sup>202</sup> By the late 1990s, Lebanese artists had already begun exhibiting, taking their politically and intellectually minded work to the international stage. Among artists from the Middle East, the artists of the postwar generation are the most visible in the international art world.

### Conclusion

Alongside the building of museums and other institutions of art, academics have also contributed to the field of modern and contemporary art from the Middle East, most actively with the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey (AMCA). AMCA is affiliated with the Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) and College Art Association (CAA) and organizes panels at both associations’ yearly conferences. Its founding board members include academics and curators in the U.S., Europe, and Middle East and include Nada Shabout, Sarah Rogers, Salwa Mikdadi, Silvia Naef, Dina Ramadan, Beral Madra, and Shiva Balaghi.<sup>203</sup> In addition to its yearly conference, AMCA also reviews books,

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>202</sup> Catherine David, *Tamáss: Contemporary Arab Representations: Beirut/Lebanon* (Barcelona: Antoni Tàpies; Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2002).

<sup>203</sup> Nada Shabout, Associate Professor of Art History at the University of North Texas, and Salwa Mikdadi have been instrumental in directing the energies of younger scholars, including Sarah Rogers (Ph.D., MIT), Anneka Lenssen (Ph.D. candidate, MIT), and Saleem al-Bahloly (Ph.D. candidate, UC Berkeley). Professors who look seriously at art and, in the one case, literature include Iftikhar Dadi (Associate Professor, Cornell University), Stephen Sheehi (Associate Professor, University of South Carolina), and Cynthia Becker (Professor, Boston University). Each of the above mentioned participated in the conference. Recently, the University of California in

offers resources about the field, and holds a competition for best graduate student paper. AMCA has a relationship with Mathaf: in 2010, AMCA held its first conference during the museum's inaugural events. Additionally, Shabout is involved in a number of Mathaf's activities, including curating and research, the latter of which she is particularly keen on developing. AMCA members play an important role in the project of writing the history of modern and contemporary art in the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey.

In position AMCA's work within the history I outline in this chapter, one informed by critiques of the Eurocentricity of the discipline of art history, the entrance of non-European American artists and curators into the mainstream, and the increasingly globalized art world. AMCA's academic bent and focus on history offer a corrective to the preference for contemporary production and a lack of focus on art history, whether regional or global.<sup>204</sup> This dissertation contributes to this process through an examination of the art historical references in Al-Ghoussein, Musa, and Raad's contemporary works. I argue that their strategies comprise institutional critiques that serve an especially important function in the context of an art world that is increasingly interested in the work of non-European artists. To examine their positions without an understanding of the histories they reference and the motivations for doing so fails to highlight the significance of their work.

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the Berkeley Art History department hired Lenssen for the as assistant professor of "Global Modern Art History." That such a position exists at such an esteemed department of Art History indicates the direction towards which the discipline is headed.

<sup>204</sup> There are exceptions to this, such as Mathaf's research department. While collaboration with AMCA indicates the museum's intention to devote resources to research, its mandate for producing publications and opening its archives for researchers has not yet come to fruition. Other initiatives that examine modern art in the region also exist, such as the project "History of Arab Modernities in the Visual Arts Study Group," co-founded by independent scholars Rasha Shalti and Kristine Khouri.

## CHAPTER 3

### Hassan Musa

*Qui expose s'expose (the one who exhibits is exposed).*<sup>205</sup>  
Hassan Musa

Hassan Musa's proverb in the epigraph describes a situation whereby artists "allow themselves to be trapped into exhibiting, and to be exposed by the exhibition curators." He continues his explanation:

the exhibition is an exercise in the contemporary marketing of art as a commodity. Its real stake is not to exhibit the works of art to the public, but to expose the object for buyers. For its organizers, an exhibition is a rite of power exercised in a social space through the manipulation of a 'triad': the art work, its creator and the public.<sup>206</sup>

Musa's critique of exhibition practices stems from his participation in exhibitions organized around the lens of identity. In the 1990s his work was included in several exhibitions framed as "Arab" or "Muslim," including *Modernities and Memories: Recent Works from the Islamic World* (47<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, 1997), *Ateliers Arabes* (Agial Gallery in Beirut, Lebanon, and the Atassi Gallery in Damascus, Syria, 1999), the Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial (Sharjah, UAE,

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<sup>205</sup> Hassan Musa, "African Proverbs of My Own Invention," in *Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa: An Exhibition*, organized by Whitechapel Art Gallery, concept and by Clémentine Deliss (Paris and New York: Flammarion, 1995), 240. Musa often distributes proverbs and an explication of their applicability during performances called *Graphic Ceremonies*.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

2012) and the sixth Sharjah Biennial (1993).<sup>207</sup> However, today he is most well known as an “African” artist because of his inclusion in major contemporary African art exhibitions, including *Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa* (1995),<sup>208</sup> *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* (2004-2007)<sup>209</sup> and *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora* (2004-2006).<sup>210</sup> Thus far, this positioning has persisted. I do not mean to suggest that framing Musa as “Arab” is more adequate. Rather, Musa illustrates how both “African” and “Arab” do little justice to the formal and conceptual complexity of his oeuvre. With his understanding of the contemporary art world as one in which artworks become commodities and non-European American artists are “exposed” according to overly simplified expressions of identity, Musa seeks to make transparent such processes in his visual art and writings, to which I refer extensively in this chapter.

In Musa’s work, representation is revealed as the product of a process of construction that is both figural and ideological. *Autoportrait en Saint Sebastian* (1997) (Figure 1.4) is an artwork in which Musa constructs his own portrayal as an artist-martyr using the body of St. Sebastian (died c. 288) and the head of Che Guevara (1982-1967). In doing so, he suggests that, like the appropriated figures, he may also be martyred for his unshakable beliefs about the art world.

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<sup>207</sup> While the Sharjah Biennial currently operates within a transnational model, it was originally organized along national lines and primarily focused on artists in the Arab region which includes Sudan. See Sharjah Art Foundation, “Sharjah Biennial,” accessed September 8, 2012, <http://www.sharjahart.org/about-us/about-us/biennial>.

<sup>208</sup> *Seven Stories* was curated by Clementine Déliiss and Salah Hassan. It premiered at the Whitechapel Gallery in London (1995) and traveled to Malmö Konsthalle in Malmö, Sweden and the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1996. The exhibition was part of *Africa 95*, an art season in the UK focusing on Africa that included exhibitions, performances, film, literature, music, public debates, and radio and television programs. *Africa 95*-related documents are held in an archive at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, England. See Archives Hub: At the Centre of Great Research, “Africa 95,” Archives Hub: At the Centre of Great Research, accessed on 23 July 2012, <http://archiveshub.ac.uk/features/050527r1.html>.

<sup>209</sup> *Africa Remix: Art of a Continent* was an exhibition of art by 88 artists in Africa and the diaspora, directed by Simon Njami with a team of curators that included Marie-Laure Bernadac (Centre Georges Pompidou), David Elliott (Mori Art Museum), Roger Malbert (Hayward Gallery), and Jean-Hubert Martin (museum kunst palast).

<sup>210</sup> *Looking Both Ways* opened in 2004 at the Museum for African Art in New York. It toured to the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts (2004); Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (2004); Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal (2004-05); City Art Centre, Edinburgh, Scotland (2005); and the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, California (2006).

Musa draws from a long visual tradition that depicts Saint Sebastian restrained with his hands tied behind his back and body shot through with arrows, a punishment meted out for his refusal to renounce Christianity in the 3rd century Roman empire.<sup>211</sup> Guevara's visage is also recognizable. Musa borrowed Alberto Korda's photograph *Guerrillero Heroico* (1960) (Figure 3.1), an image that has become iconic through its reproduction on tee shirts, lighters, posters and coffee mugs, among other things. Guevara's commodification is ironic, for he was a Marxist guerilla revolutionary who died fighting at the hands of the Bolivian army, which was aided by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>212</sup> By recruiting the revolutionary Che Guevara and the Christian St. Sebastian, Musa incorporates two myths, the hero and the martyr, into his self-portrait and posits that his critique of the art world situates himself similarly. Like Sebastian and Guevara, who have become mythic symbols of heroism and martyrdom through processes of visual and textual representation that have consequently been commodified,<sup>213</sup> Musa argues that

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<sup>211</sup> St. Sebastian was a high officer in the empire of Diocletian, who held him in great esteem. He was secretly a Christian and used his position to convert people to Christianity, protecting those who were persecuted for their religion. When Diocletian learned of St. Sebastian's religion, he asked him to renounce Christianity, but Sebastian refused. The emperor ordered him tied to a stake and shot to death with arrows. After Sebastian was left for dead, Irene, the widow of one of his martyred friends, came to bury him, only to find him alive. After Irene nursed him back to health, Sebastian returned to Diocletian to reproach him. Diocletian again ordered his execution, this time by being beaten to death with clubs. St. Sebastian's hagiography is recounted in Anna Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, ed. Estelle M. Hurl (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1895), 405-418. For a history of the reign of Diocletian, see Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>212</sup> Henry Butterfield Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies and Diplomats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4. Also see Michael Ratner and Michael Steven Smith, eds., *Che Guevara and the FBI: The U.S. Political Police Dossier on the Latin American Revolutionary* (Melbourne and New York: Ocean Press, 1997). For Guevara's biography, see Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 2010). Guevara wrote extensively throughout his lifetime. See Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Method* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1964); Ernesto Guevara, *Episodes of the Revolutionary War* (New York: International Publishers, 1968). Ernesto Guevara, *The Complete Bolivian Diaries of Che Guevara, and Other Captured Documents*, ed. Daniel James (New York: Stein and Day, 1968); Ernesto Guevara, *Venceremos! The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara*, ed. John Gerassi (New York: Macmillan, 1968); Ernesto Guevara, *Che Guevara Speaks: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. George Lavan (New York: Merit Publishers, 1967); Ernesto Guevara, *Che: Selected Works of Ernesto Guevara*, eds. Rolando E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969).

<sup>213</sup> Anna Jameson not only recounts the lives of saints, she also discusses their representations in art in five volumes. The first reference to St. Sebastian appears in the *Deposito Martyrum*, a document that lists the martyrs buried in Roman catacombs. Ambrose of Milan, a powerful 4th century bishop who held great sway over several emperors, is believed to have written accounts of the saint's life. They are compiled in the *Acta Sanctorum*. See "Passio S. Sebastian," *Acta Sanctorum* 629-42, accessed September 3, 2012, <http://acta.chadwyck.co.uk/>. Jacopo da Voragine

when his work is exhibited, he himself is “exposed” and made to fit into predetermined frames that are saleable as “African.” It is Musa’s refusal to quietly accept the terms of such exposure that subjects him to his potential art-world martyrdom.

Musa’s martyrdom is not literal. Rather, his metaphorical martyrdom deals with his experience as a contemporary artist whose work is most often framed as diasporic and African. In his writings, Musa discusses *ArtAfricanism*, a term he coined to critique the process by which African artists are pigeonholed via identity in the contemporary art world. Musa argues that for an artist to participate in exhibitions of African art,

first he must be born somewhere in Africa, preferably in black Africa. Second, you better be accessible or reside in a convenient proximity to the place of the event. Africa is too far! If you do not meet the two conditions mentioned above, you’ll still have a chance if you are an American, French or British dark-skinned black, from the so-called “African Diaspora.”<sup>214</sup>

In other words, for an African artist to succeed, he must perform and embody this identity via his biography, formal approach, and conceptual frames in his work. Though the art world is the target of his critique, Musa illustrates it by referencing Josephine Baker, the African-American performer who found fame in 1920s Paris, and Sara Baartman, otherwise known as the Hottentot Venus, a Khoikhoi from Southern Africa woman who was brought to Europe as part of an ethnographic display.<sup>215</sup> Baker and Baartman became famous because of the way they signified African stereotypes, in particular primitivism and hyper-sexuality, through performance and

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wrote another popular medieval hagiography that included Saint Sebastian. See Jacopo da Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Caxton, ed. Frederick Startridge Ellis (London: Printed for the Holbein Society by Wyman & Sons, 1878).

<sup>214</sup> Hassan Musa, “Qui a Inventé les Africains?” *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 620-621 (August-November 2002): 61. Musa provided me with a portion of this article that he translated into English.

<sup>215</sup> The term “Hottentot” is a derogatory one used to describe Khoikhoi people from Southern Africa. Zoe Strother explains that, though the origins of the word “Hottentot” are unknown, it likely derived from the Dutch words “hateren” and “tateren,” meaning stutter and stammer, respectively, a reference to the clicking sounds of the Khoikhoi language. See Z. S. Strother, “Display of the Body Hottentot,” in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; Cape Town: David Philip, 1999), 3.

display.<sup>216</sup> By integrating Baartman and Baker, women who are neither “contemporary” nor visual artists, Musa situates *ArtAfricanism* within a historical schema of representations of Africans, what Salah Hassan terms a “genealogy of representation of the black body in European visual culture.”<sup>217</sup> Musa draws parallels between his experience as an artist and that of Baker and Baartman, whose performances were read through the lens of an *a priori* African identity.

I unpack Musa’s interrogation of the myth of the African using Roland Barthes, who described myth as “a system of communication,” “a mode of signification; a form” “that cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea.”<sup>218</sup> Rather, Barthes argues that myth is a process of communication that *creates* concepts and ideas. Using semiotics, which describes language as a relational system of meaning-making whereby the signifier and the signified come together in an associative relationship to create a sign, Barthes indicates that myth is created through a second layer of meaning related to the system of meaning making in language.<sup>219</sup> Myth takes the linguistic sign as the mythic signifier (he renames it as “form”) and, through an associative relationship with another signified (which he refers to as “concept”), produces a sign that he renames “signification.” Whereas in the system of language, the relationship between the signifier and the signified produces a sign in a complete and meaningful system, as the new signifier in a second system of meaning-making, myth is made to stand for a new idea, a

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<sup>216</sup> Sander Gilman discusses the ways in which the black female body signifies in representations in late 19th century European art, medicine and literature. He argues that the black *female* body especially is shown to be oversexed and degenerate, characteristics that were physically manifest in the Hottentot body, specifically the buttocks and vagina. Therefore, the Hottentot was represented as the “antithesis of European sexual mores” and, following, “the black occupied the antithetical position to the white on the scale of humanity.” Sander L. Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 212.

<sup>217</sup> Salah Hassan, “Hassan Musa: The Artist as a Critic,” in Laurie Ann Farrell, Valentijn Byvanck and Museum for African Art, *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora*, 125.

<sup>218</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972), 107.

<sup>219</sup> The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) founded semiotics. He developed the concept of the sign, signifier, signified and referent and transformed understanding of linguistics by arguing that the relationship between signs and meaning can only be understood within the context of social experience. See Carol Sanders, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

stereotype that has been naturalized by its instantiation as a first order sign. I read Musa's incorporation of Josephine Baker and Sara Baartman in terms of this relationship: Baker's and Baartman's characterizations as oversexed and primitive could only work in the context of the racist representation of Africans as sub-human.<sup>220</sup> Through a trans-historical juxtaposition of people of African descent who have been understood as embodying this notion of African-ness, Musa shows how the myth of the African has manifested in different ways throughout history, including the art world.<sup>221</sup>

Given artists' increasing wariness towards representing the body of the "other," the prevalence of bodies in Musa's paintings is a question worth investigating.<sup>222</sup> Musa's *ArtAfricanism* describes how representations (images, histories, art critiques, art exhibitions, performances, ideologies, etc.) function within a system of signification whereby "African" has historically been understood from within an inflexible, essentialized, and racialized frame. But rather than give up the project of representation, Musa loads his paintings with bodies in an effort to reveal the ways in which meaning is constructed, an approach to what Okwui Enwezor described as the rejection of the "usage of any fixed meaning of blackness as an ideology of

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<sup>220</sup> While Gilman argued that Baartman "remained representative of the essence of the black, especially the black female," Strother takes the critique further and reveals that Khoikhoi were perceived as separate species from "the black race." See Strother, "Display", 39; Gilman, "Black Bodies," 206.

<sup>221</sup> Throughout this chapter, I use the terms "African-ness" and "blackness" as mythical significations. In other words, I do not suggest that there is truth behind these terms, but that these terms have historically been used to demarcate, describe, and fix African identities. The notion that it is possible to characterize a place as complex and diverse as the continent of Africa (or any continent) in one fell swoop is indicative of essentializing impulses.

<sup>222</sup> Jacqueline Francis discusses the use of cartoon aesthetics in the work of artists Laylah Ali and Kojo Griffin, whereby figures are not "legibly raced." Francis reads this as a rejection of "essentialist formulation[s] of blackness and the reductive rhetoric of the 'black experience.'" See Jacqueline Francis, "To Be Real," 196. For discussions on visibility, representation and violence in the African American context, see Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jacqueline Denise Goldsby, "Through a Different Lens: Lynching Photography at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," in *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Krista Thompson, "The Sound of Light: Reflections on Art History in the Visual Culture of Hip Hop," *Art Bulletin* 91, no. 4 (December 2009): 481-505.

authenticity, or whiteness as a surplus enjoyment of superiority.”<sup>223</sup> Musa appropriates the black body (along with others) in order to dislodge the “fixities” and “surpluses.” He does so by referencing figures from popular culture, politics, and famous art works across time and geography. Furthermore, rather than use blank canvases, he paints on mass-produced, pre-printed fabric and incorporates the patterns into his compositions. This strategy adds greater complexity because the images on the fabric are already loaded with histories. Musa says:

Fabric is a found object that functions according to the symbolic and technical developments that contribute to its making. It has its own nature and it opens a space of aesthetic exploration for me. Thus a fabric printed with sunflowers leads me to Van Gogh, just as prints of bananas lead me to Josephine Baker. I cannot avoid it! My images are an addition to what already exists, just like my presence in the world.<sup>224</sup>

Musa capitalizes on the meanings and references associated with images printed on the fabric and integrates them into his paintings. Musa’s paintings are therefore layered with not only Barthes’ “mythical significations,” but also more innocuous “signs.” Through formal and conceptual layering and juxtaposing, his paintings become palimpsests that reveal the ways in which meaning is made. But while Musa presents layer upon layer of significations, his paintings are far from transparent. They require the viewer’s familiarity with contemporary and historical issues in society, politics, and art. In this way, audience is an important part in elucidating the histories to which his appropriations refer and the critiques his paintings produce.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Okwui Enwezor, “Reframing the Black Subject,” in Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 398.

<sup>224</sup> Hassan Musa, “Images Sacrées, Images Politiques: entretien de Lucie Touya et Thierry William Koutedki avec Hassan Musa,” *Africultures*, August 2005, accessed on 15 August 2012, <http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=4156>. The original quote reads: “Un tissu est un objet trouvé qui fonctionne, par sa propre nature, comme tissu d'événements symboliques et techniques, il m'ouvre une piste d'exploration esthétique inattendue. Ainsi le tissu imprimé avec des motifs de tournesols me guide vers un Van Gogh tout comme celui avec les bananes m'oriente vers Joséphine Baker; je ne peux pas l'éviter! Mes images sont un complément de ce qui existe déjà. Tout comme ma présence dans le monde.” (Translated by the author.)

<sup>225</sup> Okwui Enwezor reads Musa’s work within the context whereby colonialism brought “Sudanese, African, and Arab artists into the discursive orbit of Western art, its legacies, methods, and formal procedures,” an encounter especially illustrated by Musa’s appropriations of European painting. See Okwui Enwezor, “Politics, Culture, Critique,” in Contemporary African Art Since 1980, eds. Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu (Bologna, Italy: Damiani, 2009), 35.

A key component in Musa's formal process, painting on pre-printed fabric, stems from his years studying painting in the Faculty of Fine and Applied Art at the Sudan University of Science and Technology in Khartoum (he graduated in 1976).<sup>226</sup> "Virgin" paper was difficult to come by, so Musa resorted to whitening paper with soap and bleach in order to paint on a blank surface. Often times, he would paint on already printed paper and work around designs in wallpaper or words on newspaper, for example. Today a large part of his oeuvre is comprised of paintings on outdated school maps and pre-printed fabric that he utilizes in whole or in part, constructing a canvas comprised of several patterns sewn together.<sup>227</sup> Recently, he has been creating works using only fabric, layering and juxtaposing patterned silhouettes.<sup>228</sup> His process involves an integration of the lines, colors and patterns on the fabric with both contemporary and historical figures from popular culture, politics, and religion that he paints. For example, in *Autoportrait en Saint Sebastian* (Figure 1.4), Musa used fabric patterned with cattails. In the painting, cattails stems pierce the torso, legs and head of the stoic figure, standing in for the arrows common in depictions of St. Sebastian.

Musa's process integrates a bit of chance. After he finalizes the painting components, he covers the patterns that will remain in the composition with wax and begins painting. Upon completion of the painting, Musa removes the wax, thereby re-integrating the patterns into his

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<sup>226</sup> The School of Fine and Applied Art of Sudan University of Technology (formerly Khartoum Technical Institute and Khartoum Polytechnic) was founded in 1946 and has since been an important center of art production in Sudan. The school developed out of the colonial Gordon Memorial College (founded in 1902), which in 1934 instituted a design department for applied arts, and included calligraphy, leather, and woodworking in an effort to engage local practices. After WWII, the department separated to become a specialized School of Design. In 1951, the School became affiliated with the Khartoum Technical Institute, which brought to the curriculum a broader variety of subjects. In 1952, the School was renamed the School of Fine and Applied Art. See Elsbeth Court, "Art colleges, universities and schools," in *Seven Stories*, 294-95.

<sup>227</sup> Musa came across the maps, which were being discarded, in a school in the French village of Domessargues where he lives. Painting on fabric allows for Musa to more economically transport his paintings, which he wraps around cardboard tubes that are shipped in sturdy containers. Unlike stretched canvas paintings or framed photographs, his work does not require specially constructed crates. Hassan Musa, interview with the author, June 13, 2008, Domessargues, France.

<sup>228</sup> I discuss one such art work, *There Are No Tigers in Africa* (2010), later in the chapter.

painting. The element of chance figures into his process, for though he plans the composition, because the patterns on the fabric intended to be integrated into his composition are not visible while he's painting, he is never sure of what the finished product will be until the end. Musa embraces what may come, and lovingly refers to the unexpected as "accidents." For example, in the bottom right of *Autoportrait en St. Sebastian*, many of the cattails are abruptly cut off where the blue field begins. Musa tempers this element of chance through the repetition of forms throughout his oeuvre, a tactic that has given him an intimate knowledge of the image contours.<sup>229</sup> When he first appropriates an image, he uses tools like projectors or stencils. With time and through repetition, however, Musa eventually draws the figure freehand.<sup>230</sup>

In this chapter, I examine a number of Musa's paintings produced between 1997 and 2010, focusing on self-portraits and other paintings in which the artist deals with the relationship between representation (both visual and ideological) and identity. To do so, he appropriates not only from art history, but also images from popular culture, creating works of art through a process of construction, appropriation, and reference. Art historian Salah Hassan examines the project of self-portraiture in contemporary African art in a 2001 article titled "Insertions: Self and Other," written for the *Authentic/Ex-Centric* catalog.<sup>231</sup> Hassan argues that Musa (one among four artists discussed) uses the project of self representation to examine the processes by which the objectification of "non-white bodies" takes place, and he does so through a reclamation of

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<sup>229</sup> In addition to forms and figures, Musa also repeats concepts throughout his work, recycling ideas that transform in signification with each new iteration.

<sup>230</sup> Hassan Musa, interview with the author, Domessargues, France, June 13, 2008.

<sup>231</sup> Hassan, "Insertions," in Hassan and Oguibe, eds., *Authentic/Ex-centric*, 26-49. Hassan focuses on Musa on page 42. Though this seems to be changing, there is no abundance of literature on Musa's practice, with the exception of some articles by Hassan, which are usually written for art exhibition catalogs. In her 2011 dissertation, Alisa Anne Belanger examines Musa's book art, a lesser-known part of his oeuvre. She particularly writes about his use of New Testament stories, through which he critiques "religious hypocrisy," violence and consumerism, as well as several *livres détournés*, a kind of book art in which the artist alters and deconstructs existing publications. See Alisa Anne Belanger, "Works with No Margins: Francophone Book Art in the Postcolonial Era," (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2011).

authorship.<sup>232</sup> I take Hassan's argument further through a focus on Musa's rejection of identity categories and insistence on his right to global access of the history of art. In my analysis, I seek to engage how performance and identity figure on and through the body in Musa's paintings. I define "performance" in two ways. The first follows Musa's references to performers whose entertainment value derived in part from the ways in which they substantiated racial stereotypes, whether purposefully integrated by the performer or projected by audiences. In the other sense, the state of performing is not necessarily a conscious act. Here I rely on Judith Butler, who convincingly argues that sex, as a category of subjecthood, is the product of discourse, which creates that which it names. Sex, she argues, "is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs...[Its] regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls."<sup>233</sup> Her work has been used to discuss race in a similar vein.<sup>234</sup> Musa's work explores blackness as a performative identity subjected to the often contentious wills of people and the whims of history. Blackness, according to Stuart Hall, "has never been just there. It has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally, and politically."<sup>235</sup> Revisionist discourses of art history, oppositional pop culture, post-colonial revolution, Western iconography, and whiteness work to produce a polyvalent performance of cacophonous intersections.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 26-49.

<sup>233</sup> Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits Of "Sex" (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

<sup>234</sup> See E. Patrick Johnson, Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Sarah Salih, "On Judith Butler and Performativity," in Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader, eds. Karen E. Lovaas and Mercilee M. Jenkins (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 55-68; Valerie Rohy, "Three Analogies: History, Psychoanalysis, Literature," in Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 1-20; Nadine Ehlers, Racial Imperatives: Discipline, Performativity, and Struggles Against Subjection (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). See also Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>235</sup> Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," in Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader, ed. Houston A. Baker Jr. et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 116.

In order to elucidate these themes in Musa's work, I draw on the concept of myth, both in the way that Roland Barthes describes it and in its more prosaic uses. As a framework, myth will allow me to trace Musa's cross-historical and cross-cultural appropriations in a way that is not only rooted in context but also rises above to incorporate them into an all-encompassing critique. While Edward Said has shown the inextricable relationship between representation, knowledge, and power, Musa tries to undo this relationship by revealing its machinations.<sup>236</sup> Musa's representations seem to offer knowledge of the outsider, the authentic, and the indigenous, only to confound this knowledge through layers of connotations and amalgams of discourses.

### **Hassan Musa's *ArtAfricanism*: "To hell with African art!"**

Musa argues that, in order to successfully function in the contemporary art world as an African artist, one must acquiesce to *ArtAfricanism*, an art world "ism" that dictates the scope and subject matter of African art.<sup>237</sup> Underlying *ArtAfricanism* is the larger and highly problematic game of identity politics that still sways the mainstream art world, whereby, as Enwezor and artist and art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu write, despite African artists' engagement in the "denationalized global field of artistic production, their Africanness is reified."<sup>238</sup> Art historian Sylvester Ogbechie minced no words when he described the situation:

I wish to condemn the reinvention of the African artist as a contemporary entertainer performing to the dictates of delighted indigenous or expatriate audiences (the 'Masquerade in the Arena' paradigm). Such ideas—that if it doesn't wear a mask or can't dance, it can't possibly be contextually meaningful or African—only reveal an intention to recast Africa in the light of a primitivism that has been so vehemently opposed. That

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<sup>236</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>237</sup> Musa offers a lengthy exposition of *ArtAfricanism* in Musa, "Qui a Inventé les Africains?" Also see Hassan Musa, "Dix trucs pour ne pas devenir artiste africain," *artexclu*, accessed 8 September 2012, [http://artexclu.blogspot.com/2007/06/dix-trucs-pour-ne-pas-devenir-artiste\\_08.html](http://artexclu.blogspot.com/2007/06/dix-trucs-pour-ne-pas-devenir-artiste_08.html). The title translates to "Ten tips to avoid becoming an African artist." See Appendix for full text.

<sup>238</sup> Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, "Networks of Practice: Globalization, Geopolitics, Geopoetics," in eds. Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art Since 1980*, 25.

many African critics and artists are willing to play along with such charades makes it all the more tragic.<sup>239</sup>

The collective desire of the art market (dealers, patrons, curators, and museum goers) for an inextricable relationship between an artist's identity and his/her possible subjects, themes, histories, and aesthetics predetermines the type of art that is made, "found," marketed, bought, and distributed. Chris Spring, curator of the African Galleries at the British Museum, referenced Musa's *ArtAfricanism* during a symposium called "Global Exhibitions: Contemporary Art and the African Diaspora."<sup>240</sup> Spring started his paper by appropriating Musa's voice and indignantly yelled "To hell with African art! I've been forced—me an artist from Africa—to consider African art as a hindrance to my artistic projects rather than a favorable framework for their fulfillment."<sup>241</sup> Spring set up his paper in this way to discuss the challenges curators of African art continue to face in the acquisition and display of art objects, a subject about which Musa has much to say.

Because he is an eloquent speaker and charismatic figure, Musa's critiques have earned him attention in the art world. He is often invited to participate in panels.<sup>242</sup> In these instances, Musa expresses his views on the state of African art, but he does not limit his discussions to

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<sup>239</sup> Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, "Exhibiting Africa: Curatorial Attitudes and the Politics of Representation in 'Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa,'" *African Arts* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 84.

<sup>240</sup> It was held at the Tate Liverpool on 19 February 2010 and can be accessed at [http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/csis-2/blackatlantic/research/2010\\_02\\_19\\_global\\_african\\_diaspora\\_3.mp3](http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/csis-2/blackatlantic/research/2010_02_19_global_african_diaspora_3.mp3), accessed on November 12, 2011.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> On 12 April 2008, along with artists Joyce Scott and Sokari Douglas Camp, Hassan Musa participated in a roundtable at the Hood Museum called "Artist's Perspectives on Black Womanhood" for the exhibition *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* (curated by Barbara Thompson for the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, NH, April 1-August 10, 2008), which included two of Musa's paintings, *Worship Objects* (2003) and *Allegorie a la Banane* (2001). The exhibition examined representations of the black female body from three historical contexts—so-called traditional Africa, the colonial, and contemporary periods—with a selection of objects that ranged from "traditional" African art to contemporary art objects and colonial-period postcards of nude and partially nude African women. The catalogue includes essays in which Josephine Baker and Sara Baartman figure prominently. See Barbara Thompson, ed., *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* (Hanover, N.H.: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008). For a review of the exhibition, see Cynthia Becker, "Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body," *African Arts* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 2009): 82-84.

contemporary artists, nor does he think of Africa's past in a vacuum. In 2004, he presented a paper at "Kleine Götter: Zeitgenössische Kunstpraktiken und die Erinnerungen im Museumskeller einladen" ("Small Gods: Contemporary Art Practices and Memory in Museum Store Rooms"), a conference organized by the Office of Cultural Affairs at the French Embassy in Germany and the Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum in Hannover.<sup>243</sup> Head of the museum's ethnology department, Anna Schmid asked, "what status should be given to the thousands of objects that have accumulated in the stockrooms of many museums, without identification or classification?"<sup>244</sup> Referring to Europe's colonial past, neocolonial present and the history of theft of objects from Africa, Musa responded by drawing connections between the anonymous prosaic objects Schmid mentioned and contemporary African artists, retorting with another question he referred to as "politically incorrect": "What to do about Africans in general? What to do about the room they take up in the time and space of Europeans?"<sup>245</sup> To answer this question, Musa considers the idea of returning that which was taken, not just objects, but

everything: our gold, silver, copper, oil, natural gas, and also our freedom, dignity, hope and broken dreams...if we are talking about fixing the wrongdoings of colonization, we could share the whole of material and intellectual goods of our world.<sup>246</sup>

Musa recognizes the implausibility of his suggestion and instead sees the subversive possibilities of keeping objects in museums as "incriminating evidence for a future trial of 'Truth and

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<sup>243</sup> The conference was held from 5 -7 November 2004 at the Lower Saxony State Museum in Hanover, Germany. Musa's presentation was titled "Comment se débarrasser des fantômes Africains?" ("How can one free one's self of the African Ghosts?"). A revised version of his paper, which included his impressions of the meeting in Hanover, was later published in both French and English. See Hassan Musa, "Ghosts of Africa in Europe's Museums," trans. Maria Moreno, *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture*, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 19-25. Originally published as Hassan Musa, "Les fantômes d'Afrique dans les musées d'Europe," *Africultures, la revue* 70, special issue on Africa and Museums (June 2007). Musa's title references *L'Afrique Fantôme*, an ethnographic study and autobiographical project written in 1934 by the French ethnographer and poet Michel Leiris who first introduced subjectivity into the supposedly objective practice of ethnographic writing. See Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique Fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951).

<sup>244</sup> Hassan Musa, "Ghosts of Africa," 19.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 24.

Reconciliation’ among peoples, in order to repair the damage caused by modern capitalism, not only in Africa, but in the whole world.”<sup>247</sup>

Musa’s critiques implicate museums, pointing to the role they played in propagating the notion that Africa was a resource for exploitation. His perspective is informed by a long history of study and activism in Sudan and abroad. After he graduated from the School of Fine and Applied Art in Khartoum, Sudan, he traveled abroad to continue his studies. Musa turned his attention to art history and obtained a Ph.D. in Fine Art and Art History from the University of Montpellier III—Paul Valéry, completing his thesis in 1990.<sup>248</sup> In his nearly 1,000-page dissertation, he examines the development of modern art within Sudan’s social, cultural, religious and political histories.<sup>249</sup> He couches his discussion within the complexity of national identity, class struggle and the rise of capitalism. Writing continues to be an important part of Musa’s life. He writes primarily in French and Arabic, and sometimes translates portions of his texts into English. Much like his painting practice, his texts engage critiques of contemporary practices in art and exhibition.

Musa applied his studies in European art history, his political activities in 1970s Sudan, and critiques of contemporary African art to produce *Autoportrait en St. Sebastian* (Figure 1.4).

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> In addition, Musa obtained a teaching diploma in Fine Arts in 1995. Most sources indicate that Musa graduated from Montpellier in the late 1970s, but according to his dissertation, Musa defended his research in 1990.

<sup>249</sup> See Hassan Musa “La Mutation des References Culturelles chez les Citadins du Soudan Septentrional: Le Cas des Arts Plastiques” (The Mutation of Cultural References in Northern Sudan: The Case of Fine Arts), (PhD diss., University of Montpellier, 1990). Musa examines a broad swath of subjects, drawing connections between traditional performative games children play and modern painting and sculpture. Musa describes the emergence of art exhibitions in Sudan within the colonial context, which, as he argues elsewhere, was used by colonial powers to shape the populace. But rather than credit the British colonial powers for the emergence of a modern art practice, Musa argues that the prevalence of body games played by children primed Sudanese for an understanding of the plastic arts. Later he would tell me that “when the British started to teach arts in the modern schools, they found students already prepared to handle artistic questions through different art experiences. Students coming from nomadic backgrounds may have found some difficulties handling graphic technical questions with modern tools (brushes, watercolours, and canvas or paper), but these persons would exhibit a great deal of skill working with different tools and more complex mediums, like the body.” Hassan Musa, email communication with the author, 16 August 2012.

At the heart of his self-portraiture is the question of representation. It is therefore apt that Musa looked to St. Sebastian and Guevara, two historical figures whose images have played an important role in shaping their personages. By referring to them in a self-portrait and in the context of *ArtAfricanism*, Musa situates himself as an icon whose meaning, produced through visual and textual representations, is encoded in the body.<sup>250</sup> Marked and identified, the body performs its identity.

Through his use of Korda's *Guerrillero Heroico* (1960) (Figure 3.1), Musa appropriates the iconic image and confers it upon himself. The photograph was taken during a memorial for the victims of an explosion in Havana, Cuba.<sup>251</sup> Since then, the photograph has been reproduced so often and in so many contexts, it has come to stand generically for revolution. Its wide appeal and prolific reproduction from posters to tattoos to mugs and lighters led the Victoria and Albert Museum to state that the photograph turned Guevara into "an icon of radical chic."<sup>252</sup> This conflict between the "real" Guevara—a revolutionary and guerilla fighter—and the Guevara that emerges through the consumption of his image is central to Musa. In *Autoportrait en St. Sebastian*, Musa altered the original depiction by orienting his gaze to the right but maintained the stoic and steadfast expression Korda captured. Juxtaposed against the saint's frail body,

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<sup>250</sup> Here Musa's use of the genre of self-portraiture engages the notion that, even when an artist produces a portrait of another, it often reflects something about the artist. Richard Shiff reads Manet's *Portrait of Zola* (1867) thusly: "the Portrait of Zola...becomes Manet's self-expression, his own vision and his own portrait." Quoted in Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 82.

<sup>251</sup> On 4 March 1960, a freighter packed with weapons and ammunition exploded when it was being unloaded in Havana's harbor. See Hart R. Phillips, "75 Die In Havana As Munitions Ship Explodes At Dock," *New York Times*, March 5, 1960, accessed July 22, 2012, <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F20B15FC355C16738DDDAC0894DB405B808AF1D3>.

<sup>252</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, "Che Guevara: Revolutionary and Icon, The Story of an Image," accessed November 9, 2011, [http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1541\\_che/index.html?page=the\\_exhibition.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1541_che/index.html?page=the_exhibition.html). The publication of Guevara's diaries written at 23 years of age during his motorcycle trip through South America introduced him to a new generation. See Ernesto Che Guevara, *The Motorcycle Diaries: A Journey Around South America* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996). For a discussion of the mythos of Guevara, see Jorge G. Gastañeda, *Compañero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997). Also see Vijay Prashad, "Che at 23: The Making of the Revolution's Poster-Boy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 40 (5 October 1996): 2736-37.

however, the figure embodies a contradiction. The head is too large and seems to teeter on a thin neck, which in the original is hidden behind the upturned collar of a zipped-up jacket. In the photograph, Guevara has a strong presence, emphasized by the angle from which Korda photographed him. Looking towards the sky, the photograph captures the revolutionary in a moment of contemplation and anger. With the awkward juxtaposition of the frail body and abstracted head, the figure is but a pastiche. Whereas I read Musa's appropriation of the myth of the martyr in terms of *ArtAfricanism*'s attempt to render him according to an essentialist identity, in this self-portrait, the not-quite-right representation questions this martyrdom by revealing its obvious construction. Musa said, "I became an African artist when I moved to Europe"; prior to this, he was simply an "artist."<sup>253</sup> In this telling, Musa describes a situation whereby expectations of "Africanness" positioned and fit him into an identity projected onto him. It is important that Musa "became an African artist" while making art, for this identity was developed and came to be known in large part through his own processes of representation.

Musa's rendering of the space in the painting also makes apparent its construction. With his youthful, nearly naked body, St. Sebastian was a popular subject among Renaissance humanist painters, for depicting Biblical stories offered opportunities to paint the human body without trespassing moral codes.<sup>254</sup> In *Autoportrait en Saint Sebastian*, Musa looked to Giovanni Bellini's *Polyptych of San Vincenzo Ferreri* (1464-68) (Figure 3.2, Figure 3.3) and Andrea Mantegna's *St. Sebastiano* (1450-59) (Figure 3.4).<sup>255</sup> The painting is not an exact appropriation, but comprises few elements from several of the saint's painted representations, most obviously a

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<sup>253</sup> Hassan Musa, interview with author, Domessargues, France, June 13-15, 2008.

<sup>254</sup> For example, David Rosand argues that Titian's many paintings of the Saint offered the opportunity to paint the male nude. See David Rosand, "Titian's Saint Sebastians," *Artibus et Historiae* 15, no. 30 (1994): 23-39. For a discussion of Saint Sebastian as protector against the plague in 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe, see Louise Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 485-532.

<sup>255</sup> Hassan Musa, email correspondence with the author, August 16, 2012.

well-chiseled chest behind which his scrawny arms are tied. Otherwise, Musa's depiction of the saint's body presents the former soldier as angular and rather bony, especially in comparison to his large feet and head. Whereas Bellini and Mantegna illustrate the saint looking up to his God in a gesture that demonstrates a fidelity bolstered by his suffering, Musa's appropriation of the latter-day revolutionary shows him staring ahead with his lone star halo. Unlike Sebastian's readiness to meet his maker, Guevara has his sights set on the here and now. Musa deleted the stake to which the saint is tied in the Bellini and Mantegna, but he provides an arch (as in the Bellini) to frame the saint. While Bellini painted a landscape in the background, thereby illustrating his ability to paint with perspective, Musa painted a shallow background in a swath of blue. In the whole painting, in fact, there is little that indicates distance between the figure, the cattails pre-printed onto the fabric, the niche, and the space these components occupy. In this way, Musa makes obvious the constructedness of the composition, which the arch especially emphasizes. While Bellini used architectural elements to frame the saint in his polyptych in Saint Vincent Ferrer church in Venice, Musa takes the visual metaphor in a different direction by transforming the columned niche into a moveable prop mounted on a stand. Though its exact function is not clear, it transforms the space of the painting into a stage, upon which the figure becomes an actor performing the martyrdom that stems from opposition to a constructed identity, the African artist. Musa likens himself to Christ, the most famed martyr, when he stated

It is curious that nobody ever asks curators or art historians to stand side by side with the artist and share the same risk with him! Is it because we keep a mythical precious image of the artist as a savior or a prophet? Is the artist condemned to reproduce the scheme of representation of the Christ, suffering on the cross and abandoned by his disciples? Does an oppositional attitude in contemporary art mean suicide for the artist?<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> See Elsabet Giorgis (interview with Hassan Musa), "Art in a Changing World: A Dialogue with Hassan Musa," *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 13/14 (Spring/Summer 2001): 111-12.

Musa understands the potential danger his critique might bring him, but he also realizes the power of the art market to appropriate such critiques in what he terms “the illusion of the *avant-garde*.”<sup>257</sup> Still, Musa proceeds with his practice of “oppositional art, some sort of a germ or an embryo of a seed which is supposed to save humanity from the ugliness of the market destiny.”<sup>258</sup> In doing so, Musa strives toward the possibility that artists might recuperate some agency.

However, many curators and collectors have maintained what Musa refers to as the “anthropological approach,” as evidenced in *Magiciens de la Terre*, whereby self-taught artists are framed as contemporary African artists.<sup>259</sup> Anthropologist John Picton indicates that the interest in untrained artists is governed by the idea that they are more authentically African, for the sign painters, coffin builders and mask carvers work in modes that are seen in opposition to imported art forms of European painting, photography, etc., that are learned in art schools.<sup>260</sup>

For example, Chéri Samba, a sign painter from the capital city of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was one such artist whose inclusion in *Magiciens de la Terre* catapulted him into the contemporary art world. Unlike the signs he painted to advertise businesses, however, his didactic narrative paintings engage the history of the DRC, focusing on subjects like the brutal dictatorship of the Belgian King Leopold, his own international success as an artist, and the ravages of the AIDS epidemic.<sup>261</sup> Philosopher Valentin-Yves Mudimbe categorizes Samba’s paintings as “popular art” that carries “a message, manipulating, arranging,

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 112. Italics in the original.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>259</sup> Musa, “Ghosts of Africa,” 21.

<sup>260</sup> John Picton, “In Vogue, or The Flavour of the Month: The New Way to Wear Black,” *Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art & Culture* 7, no. 23 (Summer 1993): 89-98.

<sup>261</sup> Bogumil Jewsiewicki, *Chéri Samba: The Hybridity of Art = L’hybridité d’un Art* (Westmount, Québec: Galerie Amrad African Art Publications, 1995); Eleanor Heartney, “The Whole Earth Show, Part II,” *Art in America* 77, no. 7 (July 1989): 90-97.

and combining signs so as to make an unambiguous pronouncement.”<sup>262</sup> For example, *Marche de Soutien à la campagne sur le SIDA* (1988) (Figure 3.5) depicts a group of men and women marching for the campaign against AIDS. Characteristic of Samba’s paintings, he includes written text—here, information about the virus and prevention. Samba’s success (his paintings have been collected by the New York MoMA and Centre Georges Pompidou) has led many to argue that it is as an indication of the west’s preference for “naïve” African art, also described as traditional.

Olu Oguibe and Salah Hassan responded to evidence of this proclivity in their contributions to the edited volume *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to Marketplace*. Hassan distinguishes “traditional” from “contemporary,” the former being “consensual, communally-based and created according to rigid and unchanging conventions,” whereas the latter is “reserved for works of those African artists who are mostly urban based, produce work according the norms of western modern art, and who exhibit in galleries, museums, first class hotels or foreign cultural centers.” The distinctions are laden with judgment, for he intends to make clear that the traditional/contemporary dichotomy is the result of the “colonizing structure in Africa.”<sup>263</sup> Though anthropologists have redefined tradition as a changing and dynamic part of culture that is shaped by the people who engage it rather than its previous characterization as something that remains unchanged through time, Hassan argues that views of traditional art in Africa posit it as unchanging. The tendency to exhibit traditional alongside

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<sup>262</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe, “*Reprendre: Enunciations and Strategies in Contemporary African Arts*,” in *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to Marketplace*, eds. Oguibe and Enwezor (London: Institut of International Visual Arts (inIVA), 1999), 40.

<sup>263</sup> Here I quote from the original publication in the journal *Nka*. Salah Hassan, “The Modernist Experience in African Art: Visual Expressions of the Self and Cross-Cultural Aesthetics,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1995): 31. It was reprinted in Salah Hassan, “The Modernist Experience in African Art: Visual Expressions of the Self and Cross-Cultural Aesthetics,” in eds. Oguibe and Enwezor, *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to Marketplace*, 214-235.

contemporary art links the two, thereby positing both in the same frame.<sup>264</sup> Oguibe similarly signals toward the dominant role of the West in defining African cultural production. He argues the “West has regularly elected to question the identity of [contemporary art], its authenticity, and in doing so to employ its own constructs of this authenticity.”<sup>265</sup> Hassan and Oguibe work to highlight the insistence to collapse the dichotomy between traditional and contemporary, thereby demonstrating the lasting effects of colonialism.

Art critic Brian Sewell illustrated the double bind in which contemporary African artists find themselves. He compared the 2005 *Africa Remix*, an exhibition of contemporary art, to London’s Royal Academy 1995 exhibit *Africa: Art of a Continent*, an exhibition of traditional art. He described traditional art as “genuinely African in that it was largely pre-colonial and pre-Christian,” a comment that can be extended to African identity, as Oguibe suggests above.<sup>266</sup> According to Sewell, the art exhibited in *Africa Remix* was a “wretched assembly of posttribal artefacts, exhausted materials” that “would easily pass for the apprentice rubbish of the European art school.”<sup>267</sup> The quality of the work in *Africa Remix* aside, Sewell was operating from a position that insists on the existence of a “genuine” Africa. It is telling that such statements are reserved for places like Africa but never Europe, for it reveals the desire for a romanticized and irretrievable past. Such responses not only value certain kinds of art but also dictate who can and should be referred to as an “African” artist.

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<sup>264</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argued this in their seminal book. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>265</sup> Olu Oguibe, “Art, Identity, Boundaries: Postmodernism and Contemporary African Art,” in eds. Oguibe and Enwezor, *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to Marketplace*, 16-29.

<sup>266</sup> Brian Sewell, “Out of Africa But Rooted in the West,” *Evening Standard*, 18 February 2005. While *Africa Remix* presented contemporary art, *Africa: Art of a Continent* presented works considered “traditional” objects like figurative sculptures, masks, leather and beadwork, and utilitarian objects. The exhibit was curated by the British painter and African art collector Tom Phillips and opened at the Royal Academy in London (4 October–21 January 1996), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (7 June–29 September 1996).

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

Hassan's attempt to distinguish between traditional and contemporary art reveals its fraught nature, especially in juxtaposition with Sewell's insistence that African identity was "genuine" prior to its contact with Europe through colonialism and Christianity, which arrived in Africa in the first century via Egypt and was adopted as the official religion in Aksum, Ethiopia, by the fourth century. Musa's *Autoportrait en Saint Sebastian* takes on both the promoters and detractors of contemporary African art and diffuses the restrictions both evince. In the self-portrait, Musa abdicates the privileged icons for an African artist and turns to the Christian and post-colonial to shift his authorial identity and ensnare "rubbish" culture and "exhausted materials" with the sacred totems of Western art.

Another area of contention that has emerged through the promotion of contemporary African art is the focus on artists in diaspora. Ogbecchie argues that this privileging marginalizes artists living and working in Africa.<sup>268</sup> Musa agrees, for, as I indicate earlier in this chapter, he indicates that "Africa is too far!"<sup>269</sup> Enwezor shifts the focus away from a politics of authenticity, referring to the criticism that diaspora artists dominate contemporary African art as "a kind of *continentalism* and prideful authenticity" and an attempt to "reverse forms of cultural capital accruing to the perceived privileges of 'diasporic' and transnational Africans working in the West." Instead, he urges a focus on the "chronic institutional deficit" that has led to a lack of resources for artists in Africa.<sup>270</sup>

Despite the work of anthropologists and theorists like Clifford and Hall, there remains a homogenous view of African identity. Early in the chapter, I quote Musa's advice to African

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<sup>268</sup> Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbecchie, "Exhibiting Africa: Curatorial Attitudes and the Politics of Representations in 'Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa,'" *African Arts* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 10, 12, 83, 84; Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbecchie, "Where is Africa in Global Contemporary Art?," *Savvy art.contemporary.african* edition 1, [http://www.savvy-journal.com/savvy\\_edition1/index.html](http://www.savvy-journal.com/savvy_edition1/index.html) accessed on 23 July 2012, 24.

<sup>269</sup> Musa, "Qui a Inventé les Africains?," 61.

<sup>270</sup> Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, "Networks of Practice: Globalization, Geopolitics, Geopoetics," in eds. Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art Since 1980*, 25.

artists: “you’ll still have a chance if you are an American, French or British dark-skinned black, from the so-called “African Diaspora.”<sup>271</sup> Musa’s reference to skin color pinpoints the heart of the matter: this particular diaspora becomes an extension of authentic “dark-skinned black” African identity, which thereby excludes other Africans. To challenge this, Musa rejects his characterization as diasporic:

Diaspora? Me? What in heaven’s name did I do to deserve such a Biblical destiny? If there is an experience of diaspora in my life, it would be the experience I lived through before leaving Sudan, the country of my birth, and after landing in France, the promised land where my “African exile” came to be accomplished.<sup>272</sup>

Musa references the Biblical narrative of the Jewish diaspora in order to demonstrate the excessive utilization of the term “diaspora” in the art world today. The relationship between the African and Jewish diasporas has long been raised, owing, as James Clifford indicates, to the shared roots of pan-Africanism and Zionism in 19th-century European nationalist ideologies as well as a shared “history of victimization by scientific and popular racisms/anti-Semitism.”<sup>273</sup>

But for Musa, diaspora is too heavy a historical weight to carry. He suggests that he would prefer to live his life free from the fetters of responsibility to a situation that happened hundreds of years ago. However, after initially dismissing the historical weight, Musa then invokes the Biblical story of the Jewish diaspora to construct his own tangible moment of artistic discovery:

Legend says that the people of the diaspora must see a “sign” that heralds the end of wandering. That sign, for me, was paper. I found myself in a large stationery shop in Lille in front of stacks and stacks of paper. I discovered there a dozen variants of watercolor paper. I took out these beautiful sheets, examined them, touched them, smelled them, and

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<sup>271</sup> Hassan Musa, “Qui a Inventé les Africains?,” 61. Musa provided me with a portion of this article that he translated into English.

<sup>272</sup> Musa, “Qui a Inventé les Africains?,” 63. Translation by Musa provided to author. Musa immigrated to France in 1978.

<sup>273</sup> James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (Aug 1994): 321. As Brent Hayes Edwards indicates, in thinking about the two histories in tandem, “we are forced to think not in terms of some closed or autonomous system of African dispersal but explicitly in terms of a complex past of forced migrations and racialization.” See Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Uses of *Diaspora*,” *Social Text* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 64. Also see Earl Lewis, “To Turn As on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas,” *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995): 765-87.

I even felt the desire to chew them, so enchanted I was. I, who had learned how to take sheets of already painted paper and wash them with soap and iron them in order to whiten them before re-painting them.<sup>274</sup>

The sign that indicated to Musa that he reached his promised land encompassed a personal, artistic (not collective and not historical) experience. The lived individual experience, rather than the looming historical narrative of generations, is foreground in Musa's history. In this way, while he does not deny the relevance of history, he also places agency in the hands of the subject/artist living in the here and now.

### **Sudan: Art and national identity**

In an effort to locate the roots of Musa's critiques, Salah Hassan writes that "the unusual combination of being simultaneously an artist, an art historian, and a critic has given Musa special access to discourses of postmodernism and to the languages and techniques of contemporary art practice around the world."<sup>275</sup> While Musa is indeed well versed in the theoretical idiom of art, *ArtAfricanism* is best understood in the context of Sudan's complicated history of art, politics, and national identity after independence from British rule in 1956.<sup>276</sup> In an article published in a special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* on Sudan, Musa describes contributions by politically active intellectuals, artists and poets to this history.<sup>277</sup> The first art exhibitions in Sudan were organized in the 1930s by British colonial figures.<sup>278</sup> Continuing into the 1950s, these exhibitions were held in schools in an effort to appeal to the local populace and attract people to colonial governmental and educational institutions. In 1956, the Sudanese

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<sup>274</sup> Musa, "Qui a Inventé les Africains?," 63. Translation by Musa provided to author.

<sup>275</sup> Salah Hassan, "Hassan Musa's ArtAfricanism: The Artist as a Critic," in Laurie Farrell, ed., Looking Both Ways: Art of the African Diaspora, 114.

<sup>276</sup> See Chapter Two. Also see Heather J. Sharkey, Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4-7.

<sup>277</sup> Hassan Musa, "The Party of Art: When the People Entered the Gallery," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 75-94. My discussion of this history is drawn from Musa's article, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-78.

Plastic Artists' Union organized the first art exhibition independent of both British colonial administration and later, those that were state sponsored. Comprised of art produced by graduates from Khartoum's College of Fine and Applied Art, it enjoyed widespread support from Sudanese artists and intellectuals. However, such exhibitions were overshadowed by the larger state sponsored exhibitions organized by Sudan's first military dictatorship (1958-1964), in which stories about the military coup (they referred to it as the "revolution") against the English were told through displays of "artifacts related to the revolution."<sup>279</sup> These early exhibitions of art and artifacts were primarily tools that both the colonial and military regime used to promote political agendas, i.e. propaganda.

After the fall of the first dictatorship in 1964, such exhibits were replaced by "plastic art" exhibitions held in Khartoum's various cultural centers.<sup>280</sup> Musa describes the organizers and participants of these "unassuming and modest" exhibits as intellectuals who, "in light of increasing awareness of the social, cultural, and geographic conditions of Sudanese society" "posited the thesis of hybridity as an aesthetic framework to define the cultural identity of the Sudan."<sup>281</sup> The poets and artists who engaged in such discussions were actively contributing to the political arena not only on the level of discourse but also on a practical level, for some held positions in the government. For example, the poet Muhammed Abdul-Hai was the Director of the Department of Culture and Information in the 1970s, and the painter Ibrahim El Salahi was Undersecretary in the same department from 1972-1975. Both figures considered their respective art forms in terms of its role in the development of Sudanese national identity. Abdul-Hai argued that it was "in the smithy of the literary mind that the new vocabulary which made it possible to

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<sup>279</sup> Musa, "The Party of Art," 79.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. In the article, Musa defines plastic art as "the art of modeling images in two- or three- dimensional media (painting, sculpture, and so on). The Term *visual arts* does not encompass the tactile presence of sculpture." Ibid, footnote 1, 92.

<sup>281</sup> Musa, "The Party of Art," 81.

describe cultural identity was originally forged.”<sup>282</sup> He embraced the notion of a Sudanese identity that was both Arab and African and quoted the political scientist Muddathir Abd Al-Rahim, who wrote

Arabism and Africanism have become so completely fused in the Northern Sudan that it is impossible to distinguish between the two even from the most abstract point of view, and the great majority of the population rightly feel that they are Arab and African at the same time, to an equal degree and without any sense of tension or contradiction.<sup>283</sup>

In the visual arts, El Salahi was instrumental in developing what is referred to as the Khartoum School.<sup>284</sup> The Khartoum School aesthetic was comprised of a combination of styles generally associated with Arab and African: forms drawn from Arabic calligraphy, Islamic motifs alongside stylized figures, and facial expressions associated with “traditional African sculpture.”<sup>285</sup> Art historian Elsbeth Court poetically describes it as “graphic inventiveness with calligraphy, usually without colour, ‘bending basic marks’ into imagery expressive of Africa.”<sup>286</sup> El Salahi’s connections to influential figures in the art world, including the German Africanist Ulli Beier and then-director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York Alfred Barr, would

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<sup>282</sup> Abdul-Hai argued this position in a paper about Sudanese literature written in response to a “Sudan in Africa,” a conference on Sudanese cultural identity sponsored by the Sudan Research Unit, a part of the Faculty of Arts, University of Khartoum in February of 1968. See Muhammed Abdul-Hai, Conflict and Identity: The Cultural Poetics of Contemporary Sudanese Poetry (Khartoum: Institute of African & Asian Studies, University of Khartoum, 1976), 5.

<sup>283</sup> Muddathir Abd al-Rahim quoted in Abdul-Hai, 4. The papers presented at the conference were published in 1971. See Yusuf Fadl Hasan, ed., Sudan in Africa: Studies Presented to the First International Conference Sponsored by the Sudan Research Unit, 7-12 February 1968, (Khartoum: University Press, 1971). The full text from which Dr. Muddathir Abd al-Rahim’s quote was drawn can be found in Dr. Muddathir Abd al-Rahim, “Arabism, Africanism and self-identification in the Sudan,” in Sudan in Africa, 228-239. For an examination of Sudanese identity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Ahmad Ibrahim Diab, Sudanese Identity Through History: An Analytical, Conceptual and Historical Study (Nasr City, Cairo: Al Dar Al Arabia for Publishing and Distribution, 2006) (in Arabic).

<sup>284</sup> The British Guiana-born painter Denis Williams, who taught at the School of Fine Art in Khartoum from 1957 to 1967, coined “Khartoum School.” Salah Hassan mentions Williams in a footnote. See Hassan, “The Khartoum Connections: the Sudanese Story,” in Seven Stories, 315. For a discussion of William’s years in London as a painter and instructor, see Evelyn A. Williams, “Denis Williams in London: 1946-1957,” *Third Text* 25, no. 2 (March 2011): 157-168.

<sup>285</sup> Hassan, “The Khartoum and Addis Connections,” in Seven Stories, 114. Salah Hassan is currently working on a manuscript about the Khartoum School called “Khartoum School: The Making of the Modern Art Movement in Sudan.”

<sup>286</sup> Elsbeth Court, “Art colleges, universities and schools,” in Seven Stories, 294.

position the Khartoum School as the official Sudanese art.<sup>287</sup> In addition to El Salahi's government post, Musa wrote that the integration of Sudanese popular culture into the Khartoum School helped to validate it. However, its dominance also marginalized artists working in other modes.<sup>288</sup> And while the Khartoum School maintained a local valence, others have pointed to its cosmopolitan character. First, many of the associated artists studied abroad in London.<sup>289</sup> El Salahi's contemporary, artist Ahmad Shibrain described the Khartoum School in terms of a practice that "made it a point to impart an international flavor to the local elements of artistic creativity."<sup>290</sup> Court similarly highlights the artists' "extensive international networking—across Africa, the Middle East, Europe and America."<sup>291</sup>

Musa's generation of artists, writers, and activists came after that of El Salahi and Abdul-Hai, and their politics were decidedly different. Still, in an essay published for El Salahi's 2013 solo exhibition at the Tate Modern in London, Musa wrote about the impact the elder had on the young aspiring artist.<sup>292</sup> First, El Salahi's international success as an artist made a future in art, which otherwise seemed a dream, a real possibility. Second was El Salahi's commitment to social causes. Though El Salahi insisted on staying out of politics, the early tumultuous decades of independence saw him imprisoned for six months in 1975 without cause, a time El Salahi describes as formative. El Salahi expressed his concerns in his art, most famously with the work *The Inevitable* (1985) (Figure 3.6), which he had conceived of while in prison and produced ten

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<sup>287</sup> Musa, "The Party of Art," 83.

<sup>288</sup> Musa, "Qui a Inventé les Africains?," 68.

<sup>289</sup> Mohammed Abdalla, El Nigoumi, Ahmad Shibrain studied at Central School of Art and Design; Kamala Ishaq, Magdoub Rabbah, Ibrahim El Salahi and Amir Nour studied at Slade School of Art (Nour also studied at Yale School of Art); Taj Ahmad studied at the Royal College of Art.

<sup>290</sup> Quoted in Hassan Musa, "The Party of Art," 82.

<sup>291</sup> Court, "Art colleges, universities and schools," 294.

<sup>292</sup> Hassan Musa, "Stories from El-Salahi's Garden," *Tate Etc.* (Summer 2013): 94-97.

years after his release.<sup>293</sup> The india ink drawing is made up of nine sheets of Bristol board on which El Salahi drew figures, some with their clenched fists pointed thrust into the air. Referred to as the Guernica of Sudan (in reference to Pablo Picasso's 1937 painting by the same name), the painting reflects on the energy of a people rising up against tyranny.

Musa's engagements with political activism were more direct than those of El Salahi. He was a member of the Organization of Democratic Artists (otherwise known as the Studio, est. 1975), an organization of Democratic and Communist artists which made use of both underground and official Communist networks. He was also the art editor of *Al-Ayyam*, a newspaper published by the Sudanese Socialist Union, where he edited a weekly page that promoted a "simplified ideological platform" that allowed activists to build diverse coalitions united in their opposition of the regime of General Gafaar Nimeiry.<sup>294</sup> *Al Ayyam* also provided Musa a platform from which he discussed the Khartoum School philosophy, in which I read the beginnings of *ArtAfricanism*. Though Salah Hassan indicates that a critique was not "directly stated," Musa's ideological platform was in clear opposition to the Khartoum School's promotion of what Hassan described as "an exotic image of Africa by borrowing motifs from traditional arts and crafts in response to the requirements of western tourists."<sup>295</sup> However, El Salahi's work is best understood when considered in terms of its effort to redeem local culture and identity in the immediate aftermath of colonialism, which laid the necessary groundwork for the next generation. As Hassan indicates, the group of students led by Musa and another artist named Abdalla Bola were "inspired by the ideas of [Franz] Fanon and [Amilcar] Cabral on

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<sup>293</sup> El Salahi was imprisoned without charge while working at the Department of Culture and Information during the reign of president Gafaar Nimeiry (1969-1985). Among other problems his constituents took issue with were rising food prices and an increasingly starving populace, but his imposition of Sharia law in 1983 prompted a popular uprising and general strike in 1985 that would lead to his unseating. See Kamal Osman Salih, "The Sudan, 1985-9," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 28, no. 2 (June 1990): 199-224.

<sup>294</sup> Musa, "The Party of Art," 88.

<sup>295</sup> Hassan, "The Khartoum and Addis Connections," in *Seven Stories*, 119.

national culture, the nature of the third-world petty bourgeoisie and its role in the post-colonial era.”<sup>296</sup> In those days, Musa and Bola rejected symbolism; rather, “their main tenet was that the essence of any visual art work is either line and colour, or mass and volume in space.”<sup>297</sup> In contrast to the “ethnocentric” works of the Khartoum School, Musa and Bola argued that Sudanese artists should be free to access “all world art as a common heritage.”<sup>298</sup> Echoes of these ideas clearly emerge throughout Musa’s later works, manifesting in his appropriations of European art, not only informed by his doctorate in European art history, but also integrated into his critique of colonialism and European hegemony.

Having contributed to the ideological development of art, national identity, and politics, Musa is an important figure in Sudanese art history. He exemplifies activists who took real risks during this tumultuous time in Sudanese history particularly and African history more generally. With the fall of European colonialism, citizens were left in a state of nationalist euphoria to develop national infrastructures and ideologies. The question of national identity in this context was very political, for it offered people a chance to assert agency and self-determination denied them under European rule. Sudanese intellectuals saw possibility in their country’s rich cultural and linguistic diversity and were behind the promotion of an identity that was both African and Arab. Musa writes that he “feels Arab, African, and Western.”<sup>299</sup> These complicated histories are often elided in narratives about African art and history used to frame exhibitions, but as this

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid. The petty bourgeoisie to which Hassan refers are the Sudanese artists who were co-opted by the British colonial system. But Musa and Bola’s critiques were more than just political. According to Hassan, by borrowing selectively from “traditional cultures,” Khartoum School artists “deprived themselves of creating new forms or compositions by limiting themselves to certain colour schemes, and negated the diverse and dynamic socio-cultural realities of Sudan”. Ibid., 119-120. See also Hassan Musa, “Fi Al Khalfiya Al Igtima’iya lil Jamaliyah Al ‘Irqiya’ [On the Social Background of Ethno-Aesthetics],” *Majallat Al Thagafa Al Sudaniya [Journal of Sudanese Culture]*, no. 4 (August 1977): 59 and 68; and Sami Salim, “Hiwar Maa’ Bola [Dialogue with Bola],” *Majallat Al Thagafa Al Sudaniya [Journal of Sudanese Culture]* 5, no. 19 (November 1981): 108.

<sup>297</sup> Hassan, “The Khartoum and Addis Connections,” in *Seven Stories*, 120.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Musa, “Qui a Inventé les Africains?,” 61.

discussion has shown, in Sudan, they were central to the political activities artists engaged. Musa's *ArtAfricanism* makes most sense when couched in this history.

### **Formal constructions of history**

Musa's tendency to integrate disparate and seemingly unrelated figures from art history, contemporary and historical pop culture, religion, and politics into his paintings, which are in turn made to engage with sometimes kitschy patterns in the fabric upon which he paints, creates a conceptual jumble. Fittingly, he refers to his work as *bricolage*, a French word that refers to a type of production that brings together existing objects rather than invents tools from raw materials.<sup>300</sup> Though the term *bricolage* was originally used by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, it soon made its way into art historical discourse. Art historian Anna Dezeuze, for example, uses the term in order to explore the process of assemblage, another term that could be used to describe Musa's process. Dezeuze identified two modes of *bricolage* in contemporary art, one of which describes Musa's work: "a studio practice for artists revisiting the failed utopias of past avant-garde movements."<sup>301</sup> Indeed, Musa's *bricolage* self-portraits might be positioned as examinations of the art world's unsuccessful attempts to open up to non-European artists, a critique of its market-focused approach and its insatiable desire for exotic productions.

But as a *bricoleur*, Musa's approach to painting is rather traditional—he has no qualms about copying from the European "masters."<sup>302</sup> Yet while his incessant references to European

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<sup>300</sup> Interview with the author, June 13, 2008. The term "bricolage" was theorized by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. by John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1966).

<sup>301</sup> Anna Dezeuze, "Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life," *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 34. Dezeuze's essay appeared in an issue of *Art Journal* that explored the concept and practice of bricolage in contemporary art.

<sup>302</sup> During a lecture at the Arab Culture Center in Sharjah, UAE, Musa described his position in a long line of artists who copied each other, specifically mentioning Vincent Van Gogh's copies of many of François Millet's paintings. Hassan Musa, (lecture in Arabic, Arab Culture Club, Sharjah, UAE, April 6, 2012).

art history may be seen to honor its traditions, particularly 19th-century painting, he puts his appropriations to critical use. He states: “Je suis aussi un glaneur, car j’arrive dans le champ de la tradition artistique européenne et je cherche de quoi nourrir mon désir de vivre. (I am also a gleaner because I come to the field of the tradition of European art and I look for that which nourishes my desires in life.)”<sup>303</sup> In an interview with professor of French Alisa Belanger, he describes his interest in innovation and indicates “a painter today is, by definition, a stubborn gleaner who asserts that, no, there are maybe still some hidden treasures that the others have not discovered.”<sup>304</sup> His statements reference François Millet’s 1857 painting *The Gleaners* (Figure 3.7), which he appropriates in *The Total Happiness (glaneuses)* (2008) (Figure 3.8).<sup>305</sup> In referring to himself as a gleaner, he indicates a relationship between himself and the peasant women in the original painting. In Millet’s oil painting, three figures bend over in search of wheat left over by the harvesters. The scene is rural; in the small village in the background, farm workers harvest bountiful fields, as evidenced by the large stacks of wheat on the left. In Musa’s iteration, he appropriated two of the three figures from the original painting. Patterned with avocados, peppers, and heads of lettuce, the fabric Musa uses as a canvas could be read as a literal reference to the farmland and its promise of food. Whereas in the original, the wheat-covered field is depicted with some detail, Musa uses a simple wash of browns and gold as an abstract depiction of the land.

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<sup>303</sup> Hassan Musa quoted in Renaud Faroux, “Le Droit-Fil de la Couture,” *Art Absolument*, no. 40, (March-April 2011): 74-81, accessed August 30, 2011, <http://media.artabsolument.com/pdf/article/40611.pdf>. Translation by author.

<sup>304</sup> Alisa Belanger, “Poetics of the Visual Text: Interview with Hassan Musa,” accessed August 21, 2014, [http://postcolonialist.com/arts/poetics-of-the-visual-text-interview-with-hassan-musa/#\\_edn3](http://postcolonialist.com/arts/poetics-of-the-visual-text-interview-with-hassan-musa/#_edn3).

<sup>305</sup> The glaneuses appear in a number of other of Musa’s paintings, including *L’Art du Deminage* (2004) and *L’Art du Deminer* (2005). The titles of both translate as “The art of minesweeping.”

However, while his choice of fabric does work on an iconographic level, Musa also refers to his incorporation of fabric into his oeuvre more broadly to suggest its role in his experimentation with materials. In the same interview with Belanger, he states:

my current work [which I discuss at the end of this chapter] with assembled and machine-sewn fabric is a natural evolution of my research in painting. The colors and textures of the fabrics (prints, solids, transparent, opaque, or shiny fabrics...) open unexpected avenues to me in the field of material thought and allow me to create new images. Thus, I see my images composed of assembled fabrics more like variations on my paintings than as the exploration of a new medium.<sup>306</sup>

His view on innovation in painting embodies a peculiar relationship with art critic Clement Greenberg's distinction between avant-garde (high art) and kitsch (low art). Written in 1939, Greenberg described the latter as an empty appropriation of "a fully matured cultural tradition" produced for the purpose of mass appeal.<sup>307</sup> In contrast, he described a truly avant-garde art as one that embodies a mode of self-criticality, which he deemed necessary in the development of a continually innovative modern art. Influenced by Marxism, Greenberg highlighted the market-driven push behind the promotion of kitsch while simultaneously admitting the paradox that the avant-garde remains "attached by an umbilical cord of gold" to the "ruling class" (or art patrons) of society.<sup>308</sup> He also discusses audience, indicating that kitsch objects were produced for consumption by those who left the countryside for urban areas, for they lacked the resources necessary to appreciate "high" art and culture. In this way, high art becomes associated with the elite who are armed with leisure time and education, whereas low art has an association with the working class. Ironically, kitsch in Musa's work functions on a similarly critical level in its reference to histories of exploitation. In Musa's hands, kitsch, which Greenberg clearly

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," accessed August 18, 2014, <http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html>.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

distinguished from forms of avant-garde art, plays an important role in his attempt to push painting to new heights.

Musa often includes the title on the surface of the painting itself to elucidate his message. He writes that “the titles of my images seek efficiency, because the images are naturally ambivalent.”<sup>309</sup> The notion of efficient communication is echoed in the form it takes in *The Total Happiness (glaneuses)*, for it is stenciled in a style typically associated with small signs seen in urban contexts. He includes more text, rendered in hand painted Gothic style calligraphy. Whereas the title extends across the top of the painting, the calligraphic text takes up nearly half the space of the work and is more integrated into the composition. Rendered in green, gold, red and brown, it covers the bottom half of the figures’ bodies and continues to the bottom of the painting. Here Musa juxtaposes a combination fabrics: two different patterns of camouflage jut up against shiny gold curlicues, lusciously open heads of cabbage, long red peppers and yellow fruits. Each in a different way, the patterns relate to the earth so integral to the work of the peasants in the original Millet, though the camouflage takes the suggestion even further through its association with war. In addition, Musa paints on and around the patterns, rendering peppers and cabbage in a shadowy, almost ghostly white at bottom center, blurring the boundaries between the text and the colors of the patterns, making it difficult to distinguish between that which is printed and painted.

The title on the painting, *The Total Happiness*, is explained in the calligraphic text below. The first part is a quote from the anthropologist Michel Leiris, which reads: “L’on est que trop porté à regarder comme heureux un peuple qui nous rend, nous, heureux, quand nous le regardons. (We are too prone to seeing as happy a people whom in fact only make us happy

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<sup>309</sup> Belanger, “Poetics of the Visual Text.”

when we look at them.)” Musa then quotes Thierry Desmarest,<sup>310</sup> the former Chairman and CEO of the French oil company Total SA:

Total a un engagement fort et ancien depuis près de soixante-dix ans pour l’Afrique. Implanté dans plus d’une quarantaine de pays africains...le groupe se doit de connaître et comprendre les communautés qui l’accueillent et être particulièrement attentif à leurs spécificités culturelles, sociales et économiques. L’Afrique est un continent complexe, multiple, surprenant. C’est par le dialogue, le respect et la compréhension des populations au sein des territoires dans lesquels il opère que Total a pu construire des bases solides et instaurer des relations de confiance. (For nearly seventy years, Total has had a strong and longstanding commitment to Africa. Operating in more than forty African countries...the group has a responsibility to understand its host communities, paying attention to their cultural, social, and economic particularities. Africa is a complex and surprising continent. It is through dialogue, respect and understanding of people in the territories in which it operates that Total has built a solid foundation and established relationships of trust.)

By juxtaposing the Leiris quote, which deals with projections and misperceptions, with a quote from the president of a multinational oil corporation drilling in Africa, and by incorporating these two quotes into a painting that figures the poorest of the poor, Musa draws connections between exploitation in the 19th and 21st centuries. In the Millet, exploitation is obviously referred to by the figure on horseback, presumably the foreman. It is also inferred through an indirect reference to the industrialization of Europe, which in large part drove artists like Millet to depict what they saw as a disappearing way of life (as well as the subsequent and, according to Greenberg, related production and consumption of kitsch). Musa’s reference to Total and its dealings in Africa indicates that exploitation continues through oil drilling and exploration. What connects the two is the history of colonialism, which was driven in large part by a search for natural resources that were quickly being depleted in Europe.

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<sup>310</sup> According to Forbes.com, Desmarest was a “graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique and an Engineer of the French Corps of Mines, Mr. Desmarest served as Director of Mines and Geology in New Caledonia, then as technical advisor at the Offices of the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Economy. He joined TOTAL in 1981, where he held various management positions, then served as President of Exploration & Production until 1995. He served as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of TOTAL from May 1995 until February 2007, and then as Chairman of the Board of TOTAL until May 21, 2010. He was appointed Honorary Chairman and remains a director of TOTAL and Chairman of the TOTAL foundation.” See “Thierry Desmarest,” accessed November 12, 2011, *Forbes.com*, accessed on 12 November 2011, <http://people.forbes.com/profile/thierry-desmarest/69949>.

Nowhere in *The Total Happiness (glaneuses)* does Musa indicate the origin of the Desmarest quote, again requiring that his audience engage in research in order to comprehend each of his references. Total SA was a major sponsor of *Africa Remix*, a large exhibition of contemporary African art, and the text was printed in the *Africa Remix* catalog.<sup>311</sup> Because he is a “contemporary African artist” who participated in *Africa Remix*, Musa suggests that he has a personal stake in the narrative critique his painting implies. It is therefore worthwhile to consider not only Millet’s painting, but also the artist himself. Art historian Robert L. Herbert described what he referred to as the “Millet-myth,” which posited that the artist had much in common with the peasants who figured in the paintings that made him famous.<sup>312</sup> The myth indicated that he was “a peasant who simply painted the life he was born to”—poor, pious, a devoted son to his mother and grandmother, a good father to his own children.<sup>313</sup> Part of this myth stems from the fact that Millet did come from a poor and rural background. But as Herbert indicates, while living in Paris, Millet became an intellectual and made a well enough living, the extent to which enabled him to employ a maid. After living in Paris for some years, Millet moved to the countryside with his family and began to use peasants as his subject. As art historian Susan Waller shows, critics in Paris appreciated Millet’s work because they saw it as authentic. One described a painting stating that “nothing is false here: these are not models who have abandoned their routines to come and assume an arbitrary pose before us; these are living beings, seen in their natural setting...”<sup>314</sup> It was important to viewers in the city that they were looking at real peasants, as though “authentic” models would offer a more true-to-life rendition. This was prompted by a nostalgia for the quickly disappearing rural life of the countryside, for the place

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<sup>311</sup> Simon Njami, *Africa Remix: L’art contemporain d’un continent*, Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2005, np.

<sup>312</sup> Robert L. Herbert, “Millet Revisited – I,” *The Burlington Magazine* 104, no. 712, (July 1962): 295.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>314</sup> Susan Waller, “Rustic *Poseurs*: Peasant Models in the Practice of Jean-François Millet and Jules Breton,” *Art History* 31, no. 2 (April 2008): 188.

and its people embodied an irretrievable past. Along with his skill as a painter, his (sometime) use of peasant models and the Millet-myth went hand in hand in granting the artist success. Musa's appropriation of Millet draws on the 19th century privileging of authenticity, which was granted to both peasants in the countryside and "primitives" in Africa. Though Millet lived over one hundred years earlier, Musa's critique of *ArtAfricanism* reveals the persistence of the myth of the authentic African. Through this invocation of the Millet-myth within Musa's appropriation of the painting, I argue that Musa also appropriates Herbert's rebuttal of the myth, thereby allowing himself to similarly reject the myth of primitivity and confound the attempt to authenticate Musa.

Appropriation is a term and strategy related to *bricolage* that has manifested extensive art historical weight in the past three decades. The extent to which Musa appropriates moves beyond his use of patterned fabric and the figures from art, history, popular culture, politics, and religion that he uses to populate his tableaux. They also speak to a second level of appropriation that involves exchanges of histories and reinterpretations of forms beyond the initial, fixed image they simulate. In order to understand Musa's diachronic borrowings, it is useful to understand the origins of the art historical term and its short history of interpretive work. Appropriation most famously refers to the postmodernist strategy employed by American artists (particularly in New York) starting in the late 1970s and 80s. In contrast to modernist painting and sculpture that art historians Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried had promoted, which by the 1970s had become fully institutionalized, postmodernist art was couched early on as "radical, even revolutionary."<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> David Evans, "Introduction: Seven Types of Appropriation," in *Appropriation*, ed. David Evans (London: Whitechapel, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 14.

Art historian Douglas Crimp identified the significance of postmodern art in an article published in *October* in the spring of 1979, first by engaging with Michael Fried.<sup>316</sup> An ardent modernist, Fried critiqued Minimalist sculpture, bemoaning its “theatricality” which stemmed from the integral relationship between the object and the physical presence of the viewer. He contrasted this to some Modernist painting and sculpture, which he described as artwork that “at every moment...is wholly manifest.”<sup>317</sup> For Fried, the integration of theatricality disintegrated visual art’s integrity through its association with other forms of expression. With its irreverence to the formal boundaries of painting or sculpture for example, Crimp noted that this mixing and blending of media was an indication of a break with modernism, which had lost its critical potential because of its institutionalization in the museum. Crimp centered on manifestations of theatricality in some contemporary art and identified a group of artists, including Sherrie Levine and Cindy Sherman, whose work engaged the notion of temporality and theater, not only through their excursions into performance art, but also in still images. Their work, Crimp claimed, is marked

by the duration of a fascinated, perplexed gaze, whose desire is that they disclose their secrets; but the result is only to make the pictures all the more picture-like, to fix forever

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<sup>316</sup> Douglas Crimp, “Pictures,” *October* no. 8 (Spring 1979), 75-88.

<sup>317</sup> In Fried’s essay “Art and Objecthood,” he lamented the demise of “presentness” of an artwork, whereby “at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest.” For Fried, the encounter with a painting should be a purely optical one, whereby hierarchy is dispensed with in terms of how a viewer perceives the painting’s elements. Engagement with minimalist sculpture involves theatricality because of the necessarily *physical* relationship between the object and the viewer. Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 167. Originally published in *Artforum*, 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967). Postmodern processes of art making transgressed the boundaries of media in practices like using photography to present sculpture or in artists’ shifting from one medium to another. Modernist art practice centered to a large extent on the integrity of the medium as a category to be explored formally. This focus on medium derived to a large extent from the writings of Clement Greenberg, a Marxist who argued that art works that expressed ideas about the world could easily be co-opted as political propaganda. Instead, he argued for an art practice that reflects the properties of the medium. Greenberg advanced these ideas in an article that brought him fame. See Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (1939): 34-49. By the 1970s, modernist art was undoubtedly institutionalized, moving it far and away from Greenberg’s Marxist leanings. See David Evans, “Introduction/Seven Types of Appropriation,” in David Evans, ed., *Appropriation*, , 14.

in an elegant object our distance from the history that produced these images. That distance is all that these pictures signify.<sup>318</sup>

This arrest allowed artists to separate the image from its context, asking viewers to consider the relationship between images and meaning. Artists like Levine and Sherman sought to emphasize the distance between representation and meaning. They attempted to denaturalize the image itself and analyze the process of signification and the role of ideology therein. Appropriation—the process of taking something already existing and placing into a new context—was an important part of their projects. Appropriation allowed artists to work out two ideas—the notion of the original and temporality—though to different ends.

Levine produced her photographic series *After Walker Evans* (1981) (Figure 3.9) by photographing Walker Evans' Depression-era photographs from an exhibition catalog. The resulting works are indistinguishable from the originals, which was exactly her point, for she sought to critique the privileged original as well as the patriarchal notion of the creator's authority.<sup>319</sup> Levine chose iconic photographs made famous for their representation of American history produced by an equally famous photographer. Walker Evans' photographs of rural Alabama during the Great Depression positioned him as an important figure in the history of photography and a perfect target for Levine's deconstruction of the (male) author and her attempt to put it to rest.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* no. 8 (Spring 1979): 85.

<sup>319</sup> In 1967, Roland Barthes wrote "The Death of the Author," in which he posited that the project of meaning making took place in a work's reception. Reading or viewing a work from a personal and subjective position, Barthes argued that its meaning was unfettered from the authorial intent. Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-148.

<sup>320</sup> Levine described her practice, aligning closely with Barthes: "Succeeding the painter, the plagiarist no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense encyclopaedia from which he draws. The viewer is the tablet upon which all the quotations that make up a painting are inscribed without any of them being lost. A painting's meaning lies not in its origin, but in its destination. The birth of the viewer must be at the cost of the painter." Sherrie Levine, "Statement," in Evans, ed. *Appropriation*, 81. Also see Craig Owens, "From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life After 'The Death of the Author,'?" in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992), 122-143.

The so-called original in Cindy Sherman's work refers to a tradition of filmic representation famously analyzed by Laura Mulvey as one that subjects women to scopophilic consumption.<sup>321</sup> In the series *Untitled Film Stills* (1978-1980) (Figure 3.10), Sherman performs stereotypical female characters associated with B movies, photographing herself in situations pregnant with the possibility that danger is around the corner. With the look of a film still, the photographs function as part of a non-existent original and give a "sense of narrative" that embodies "simultaneous presence and absence, a narrative ambiance stated by not fulfilled."<sup>322</sup> By halting a film that never existed, Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* rejects narrative time yet simultaneously requires that the viewer read it through "the temporal mode of which it is a fragment."<sup>323</sup> It therefore, tenuously occupies both spaces. While temporality in performance, film, and video was evident, Crimp read temporality in the way Sherman's photographs were presented as film stills: temporality becomes "a function of their structure."<sup>324</sup> This focus on temporality was echoed in literature describing the postmodern era, in which the modernist view of history in terms of teleological advancement was replaced with the postmodern proclamation of the end of history.<sup>325</sup> Writing nearly thirty years later, Jan Verwoert discussed the disintegrating relationship between images and meaning, claiming that Crimp's writings (among others') "revolve around an experience of death, the certain death of modernity and the sense of history it implied."<sup>326</sup> Yet these writers, Verwoert argues, were in denial: "the dead might actually not be as dead as they are declared to be."<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

<sup>322</sup> Crimp, "Pictures." 80.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>325</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

<sup>326</sup> Verwoert describes the moment when historical meaning died, pointing to the Cold War: "The Cold War had frozen time and mapped it on space as it fixed the historical situation after World War II for over four decades in the form of a territorial order of rigid geopolitical frontiers." This only ended with the fall of Communist governments

Verwoert offered a historical overview of the practice of appropriation to consider the difference between the way appropriation functioned in the 70s and 80s and today. Whereas the postmodern period ushered the notion of the “death of historical meaning,” in the 1990s, artists and theorists began to insist upon the existence of a “multiplicity of histories,” a project that I discuss in the context of art and art history in Chapter Two. Verwoert describes these histories as “a multitude of competing and overlapping temporalities born from the conflicts that the unresolved predicaments of the modern regimes of power still produce.”<sup>328</sup> Artists using the strategy of appropriation today act as enablers of these asynchronous histories, offering them room to speak, to signify a cacophony of diachronous meanings. This is very different from practices of appropriations in the 80s, which Verwoert describes as “the re-use of a dead commodity fetish,” with its death located in “a sense of presence without historical meaning” and “the breakdown of signification.”<sup>329</sup> When Musa appropriates St. Sebastian, Che Guevara, or Millet’s *Gleaners*, he is not attempting to distance them from their historical meanings or to understand the primary contextual significance and its specific ideologies. Rather, he compounds past histories, invokes the transformations of history, and slyly constructs a new narrative to be unfolded by the viewer. Musa appropriates historical and cultural icons to critique what Verwoert identified as the increasing power of capitalism and commodity in everyday life.

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in Poland and Hungary, most iconically represented by the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. By allowing West and East Berliners access to each other, the opened borders enabled “a multitude of subjects with visa to travel across formerly closed borders and unheard histories to tell.” Francis Fukuyama indicated that 1989 marked the “end of history,” in that liberal democracy emerged as the only feasible economic and political world system. Jan Verwoert, “Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art,” *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2007), np, accessed December 15, 2009, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/verwoert.html>. For Fukuyama, see Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992). For a discussion of the significance of the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of Communism in Europe, see Katharina Berstenberger and Jana Evans Braziel, eds., *After the Berlin Wall: Germany and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>327</sup> Verwoert, “Living with Ghosts,” 2007.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

Through Musa's layers of appropriated figures, the subject of his work emerges as one that transgresses temporal and geographic boundaries. His is a process that gleans more meanings that gather and multiply to produce new significations. In this way, his appropriations are like cuts into material culture that "might, at least partially, free that slice of material culture from the grip of its dominant logic and put it at the disposal of a different use."<sup>330</sup>

Nicolas Bourriaud considers contemporary appropriation strategies using the language of the music industry. His discussion centers around the practice artists engage rather than the products they produce. Borrowing the term "postproduction," Bourriaud identified and named a "culture of sharing" in which the artist is a "user of forms."<sup>331</sup> Verwoert agrees that it is not possible to claim ownership over images, styles, and ideas that have been used over and over through their appropriation.<sup>332</sup> Appropriation cannot lead to ownership. Similarly, Bourriaud insists that artists borrow forms in a practice of production akin to that of the DJ:

The work of the DJ consists in conceiving linkages through which the works flow into each other, representing at once a product, a tool and a medium. The producer is only a *transmitter* for the following producer, and each artist from now on evolves in a network of contiguous forms that dovetail endlessly.<sup>333</sup>

Bourriaud sees this trend as a "culture of constant activity of signs based on a collective ideal: sharing."<sup>334</sup> While Bourriaud's concept describes an idealized world that promotes equal access through an almost socialist system, Musa thinks about sharing from a postcolonial perspective.

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2005), 39.

<sup>332</sup> Verwoert eloquently asks "how would you clarify the status of ownership of something that inhabits different times, that travels through time and repeats itself in unpredictable intervals, like for instance, a recurring style in fashion, a folkloristic symbol that is revived by a new political movement to articulate its revisionist version of a country's history or a complex of second rate modernist architecture occupied by residents who know nothing of its original designs but still have to find a way of living with the ghosts that haunt the building. Who owns a recurring style, a collective symbol or a haunted house? Even if you appropriate them, they can never be entirely your private property. Dead objects can circulate in space and change owners. Things that live throughout time cannot, in any unambiguous sense, pass into anyone's possession." See Verwoert, "Living with Ghosts."

<sup>333</sup> Bourriaud, Postproduction, 41.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 3.

He states “the whole European cultural tradition is a war booty in which I situate myself as a legitimate heir to all the human cultural fortune that the European tradition could encompass, including non-European traditions.”<sup>335</sup> He engages the history of colonialism, the theft of cultural patrimony, and the contemporary inequalities of global capitalism. In counterpoint, he appropriates the cultures, forms, and aesthetics of the colonizer, utilizing these cultures to speak to multiple histories and contiguous experiences.<sup>336</sup> Musa references the Algerian writer and playwright Kateb Yacine, who was criticized by his compatriots for writing in French, the language of the colonizer. Yacine famously declared, “the usage of the French language does not mean that one is an agent of foreign power; and I write in French to tell the French that I am not French.”<sup>337</sup> Musa stakes a claim of world citizenship to secure the right to use whatever tools are at his disposal to produce art and critique. His work therefore adds a critical dimension to Bourriaud’s concept of postproduction, which fails to consider the European history of appropriation, indeed, theft, that accompanies war and colonialism.

Musa’s evocation of the colonial past is a reminder that images and objects embody histories. Verwoert discusses the “ghosts of historic visual languages,” insisting that “to isolate, display and, as it were fix this concept, image or object in the abstract space of pure analysis is no longer enough.”<sup>338</sup> Not only is it not enough, it is not possible, for “to utter words for the sake of analysis already means to put these words to work.”<sup>339</sup> Because forms, ideas, and images have

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<sup>335</sup> Hassan Musa, “El Botí de Guerra Occidental,” in *Occident vist des d’Orient* (Abdelwahab Meddeb, Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 2005), 147. Translation by Musa provided to the author.

<sup>336</sup> Verwoert describes the difference between appropriation in the 80s and today as “a shift from not enough to too much history or rather too many histories.” Verwoert, “Living with Ghosts.”

<sup>337</sup> Musa, “Qui a Inventé les Africains?,” 66. Quoted in Taha Djaout, *L’invention du Desert* (Novel: Editions du Seuil, 1987), 9.

<sup>338</sup> Verwoert, “Living with Ghosts.”

<sup>339</sup> Verwoert indicates that “the aim of appropriation can no longer be analysis alone, quite simply because the effects of staging an object of appropriation can no longer be contained in a moment of mere contemplation. When you call up a spectre, it will not content itself with being inspected, it will require active negotiations to accommodate the ghost and direct its actions or at least keep them in check.” Verwoert, “Living with Ghosts.”

a life of their own, when Musa calls on the ghosts of these forms, he invokes their histories. In a process that involves both consumption and production, his appropriations of historically, politically, and culturally significant artworks and figures offer viewers of his paintings a new lens through which to view both the source paintings and their contemporary reincarnations. The “ghosts” that populate Musa’s paintings clamor in a cacophonous symphony of histories; they are “objects already *informed* by other objects” and other histories.<sup>340</sup> They transform with each instance of depiction and therefore carry not only the weight of the initial context of its production, but also the decades (and in some cases centuries) of meaning-making. This is key for Musa, for in order to create paintings comprised of layers of reference, the artist gleans rich art historical signifiers and contemporary mass media. Musa collects the repetitions in history, the detrimental old habits that never die, and makes of them his own feast of history.

*The Total Happiness (glaneuses)* (Figure 3.8) is a bricolage made up of printed fabrics, waxed on, painted over and stripped. It is a material process about prolific production, traces, erasures, embellishments and accumulations. In this way, the concept of gleaning is a theme that reads in various ways: just as the peasants glean left over wheat, Musa gleans both from the fields of art history as well as the fabrics he uses as canvas, the prints of which he integrates. Like his self-portraits, it positions the artist as a *bricoleur* whose appropriations allow space for the ghosts of history to speak. The *Gleaners* and the quotes from Leiris and Desmarest all retain their own histories and particularities, but by bringing them together, Musa refers to a larger history of colonial and neocolonial exploitation, while keeping in mind the myths, in this case the primitive rural and the primitive African, used to undergird the oppression. Musa’s painting therefore highlights continuity and illustrates it with the bandaged hands. Musa superimposed an

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<sup>340</sup> Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 7.

arc of six hands, which begin near the head of the figure on the left and move down and right to the center of the painting. While the women are abstracted from their original context and painted with impressionistic brush strokes, the hands are carefully detailed. The arc illustrates a progression whereby the wrapping grows more and more complete, ending with a fully wrapped hand at the right side of the arc. This hand seems less disembodied than the others because the paint Musa used to highlight part of the skirt mimics the shape of an arm. It reaches toward the left figure's extended arm in a gesture that seems at one instance like it is comforting the woman, and at another as though it is joining in the work of gleaning. In either case, it comes out of nowhere, almost ghostly in its presence. Unlike the frozen temporality evident in the work of the early appropriationists, Musa renders these hands with a sense of temporality evinced both in their movement across the painting's surface and in the depiction of their wrapping. Never fully bandaged, they remain in a processual state. The hands point to the repetition of historical wounds that have yet to heal. As Verwoert indicates,

If we assume that horizon of our historical experience today is defined by the ambiguous influences and latent presence of the unresolved histories, the ghosts of modernity, then an act of appropriation that seeks to show what it means for something to mean something today must expose these unresolved moments of latent presence as they are, and that means first of all, not to suggest their resolution in the moment of their exhibition.<sup>341</sup>

While making connections between oppressed people, in this case poor women in 19th century France and Africans whose land and resources are exploited by multi-national corporations and the local governments that also benefit, Musa's appropriations do not resolve these histories, thereby highlighting their sustenance. Rather, he conjures them up in his paintings and allow them to speak.

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<sup>341</sup> Verwoert, "Living with Ghosts."

## Performing blackness / Representing representations

Musa's engagement with self-portraiture and identity entails the appropriation of experiences and histories despite identity differences (race, sex, gender, nationality, etc.). He is obviously not a 19th century peasant woman, a 20th century Argentine revolutionary, a bourgeois realist, nor is he a 3rd century Christian martyr. Still, he appropriates these historical identities to construct his paintings, which critique the notion of authentic identity. Two women that figure often in his paintings are Sara Baartman (1789-1815) and Josephine Baker (1906-1975).<sup>342</sup> Baartman, otherwise known by the epithets "Hottentot Venus" and Sartjie, which translates as "little Sara" in Afrikaans, was a South African Khoikhoi woman who was born with steatopygia and brought to West Europe in the early 19th century as an ethnographic spectacle.<sup>343</sup> The African-American performer Josephine Baker was also a transplant, making her fame in Parisian cafes in the 1920s and in films produced from the late 1920s through the 1950s.<sup>344</sup> Baartman and Baker play a significant role in Musa's oeuvre, sometimes appearing as the sole figure in a painting, such as Baartman in *Vénus de la Mer du Japon (carte) (Venus Hottentot)* (2002) (Figure 3.11), and other times pictured together, as in *Autoportrait Avec Idées Noires*

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<sup>342</sup> Baartman's real name was never recorded. But as Zoe Strother indicates, the use of the diminutive in the 19<sup>th</sup> century functioned to differentiate slaves and non-Europeans, "effectively relegating adults to the status of children." Sandra Klopper in email communication with Z. S. Strother, 48.

<sup>343</sup> Coined in the 1800s, Baartman's condition, *steatopygia*, "is a scientific classification denoting an excessive development of fat on the buttocks that occurs chiefly among women of some African peoples and especially the Khoikhoi. It is a racist categorization that pathologizes the natural physique of certain women." Sara L. Warner, "Suzan-Lori Parks' Drama of Disinterment: A Transnational Exploration of *Venus*," *Theatre Journal* 60, no. 2 (May 2008): 1.

<sup>344</sup> Baker's films include the silent black and white *Die Frauen von Folies Bergères* (1927), *La revue des Revues* (1927), *Siren of the Tropics* (1927), *La Folie du Jour* (1929), *La Pompier des Folies Bergères* (1930), *Zou Zou* (1934), *Princesse Tam Tam* (1935), *Moulin Rouge* (1940), *The French Way* (1945), and *An Jedem Finger Zehn* (1954). Baker made a guest appearance on *Acht Nach 8*, a German television game show from 1973. See Carola Herzogenrath, *Hans-Joachim Kulenkampff im Deutschen Fernsehen: Charakteristische Formen der Moderation* (Wissenschaftler: Verlag W. Faulstich, 1991). For an analysis of race in Baker's films, especially *Zou Zou* and *Princesse Tam Tam*, see Eileen Julien, "Now You See It, Now You Don't: Josephine Baker's Films of the 1930s and the Problem of Color," in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, eds. Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton and Stephen Small (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 48-62; Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

(Self-portrait with Dark Thoughts) (2003) (Figure 3.12). Both were performers who took to the stage before paying audiences who expected specific physicalities and rituals of their identities to be on display. Comparative literature scholar Ayo Abiétoú Coly argues that their reception as “the most famous and ‘invited over’ black bodies in the history of French immigration” was precipitated by the circulation of images of African women on colonial-era postcards.<sup>345</sup> Indeed, Musa’s decision to bring these two women together in a painting is not far-fetched. As film studies scholar Terri Francis indicates, “when Baker debuted in Paris in 1925, she walked into a preexisting role that had been previously ‘interpreted’ by Sartjee Baartman on stage as ‘La Vénus hottentote,’ Laura as the black female figure in Edouard Manet’s 1863 painting *Olympia*, and Baudelaire’s writings inspired by his Creole mistress, Jeanne Duval—as well as the American jazz bands and other performers that date back to the nineteenth century.”<sup>346</sup> But while they were literal performers, both women also performed particular perceptions of blackness.<sup>347</sup> That is, they each conjured a particular representation of blackness projected and consumed by their audiences. During both Baartman and Baker’s lifetimes, such representations served the colonial project, for in depicting Africans as indolent, primitive, and base, Europeans could justify their

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<sup>345</sup> Ayo Abiétoú Coly, “Housing and Homing the Black Female Body in France: Calixthe Beyala and the Legacy of Sarah Baartman and Josephine Baker,” in *Black Womanhood*, ed. Barbara Thompson (London: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 259. For a discussion of postcards produced during and in France’s colonization of North Africa, see Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>346</sup> See Terri Francis, “The Audacious Josephine Baker,” in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 250. Not so coincidentally, Musa has also appropriated the above-mentioned painting by Manet in his *Great American Nude* series. In them, the figure of the courtesan is treated variously—sometimes Osama Bin Laden takes her place and sometimes Olympia’s head is covered with a bag. As for Laura, in the latter iteration, Lynndie England, the U.S. soldier made famous for her appearance photographs taken of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib who were subjected to abuse, comes in to take the black servant’s place. Here, nationalism, militarism, sex, and race come together in a critique of American imperialism. For discussions on the complex relation between nationalism and sexuality, see Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds. *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>347</sup> Ironically, the continued interest in these women and their stories has brought greater attention to Musa’s work.

presence in, and exploitation of, Africa.<sup>348</sup> Musa's self-portraits appropriate these performances of blackness in an effort to reveal processes of representation, performance and historical agency.

In *Vénus de la Mer du Japon (carte) (Venus Hottentot)* (2002) (Figure 3.11), Musa referred to a cast made of Sara Baartman's body after her death (Figure 3.13) and painted it on an outdated school map of the Sea of Japan. The work emphasizes Baartman's performance as a fixed—literally dead—body that was always/already suited for visual and physical scrutiny and which was the object of scientific mapping. Sara Baartman was a slave in Cape Colony in South Africa when her physique caught the attention of Henrik Cezar and William Dunlop, visitors to the farm where she worked. Specific details of her life are unknown, but she did sign a contract agreeing to travel with Cezar to Europe in 1810.<sup>349</sup> It is doubtful that she understood what lay ahead of her. Cezar called her the “Hottentot Venus,” adding “Venus” to the name to make a joke, as she was considered unattractive by European standards. In Europe she was put on stage in vaudeville shows and circuses and made to play music, dance, and gyrate her buttocks in front of gawking Europeans, who perceived her body a freakish curiosity, debased, and savage.<sup>350</sup> Such modes of representation presented Baartman as a savage, thereby reaffirming the white Frenchwoman's sexual appeal.<sup>351</sup> But while she was reviled, she also had an impact on Victorian views on beauty, revealing what cultural critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr. described as a simultaneous fear and desire of the black body.<sup>352</sup> Professor of women's studies Janell Hobson

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<sup>348</sup> Strother, “Display.” Also see Sadiyah Qureshi, “Displaying Sara Baartman, The ‘Hottentot Venus,’” *History of Science* 42, no. 136 (June 2004): 234.

<sup>349</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 18.

<sup>350</sup> Strother, “Display”, 6-12.

<sup>351</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, “Representing Sarah—Same Difference or No Difference at All? *La Vénus hottentote, ou haine aux Françaises*,” in *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 34.

<sup>352</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. also writes about the simultaneous desire for and fear of the black body. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Body Politic,” in *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man* (New York: Random House, 1997).

argues that Baartman's buttocks inspired the use of bustles in European women's fashion, thereby imitating her full buttocks.<sup>353</sup>

Baartman's figure was also the subject of caricatures that ridiculed not only her physical body, but also Europeans' fascination with her. In a hand-colored etching from 1822 (Figure 3.14), Baartman is depicted with paraphernalia, particularly the walking stick and *kaross* (the sheepskin mantle draped on her shoulder), which identified her as a Khoisan.<sup>354</sup> Her face is painted, she smokes out of a pipe, and her *kaross* does nothing to cover her breasts and buttocks, which, by comparison to her postmortem cast, are exaggerated. Art historian Zoe Strother writes that the pipe, part of the Khoikhoi visual repertoire of the time, signified indolence, further suggesting the justification of "Khoikhoi dispossession through its associations with laziness, somnolence, and economic subjugation."<sup>355</sup> Perched on her buttocks is a rather sinister-looking cupid, who warns (the presumably male viewers) to "Take care of your Hearts!" as he prepares to shoot his arrow. While emphasizing Baartman's physicality, the warning also points to the anxiety around miscegenation, mildly masked through the use of comedy.<sup>356</sup> After only five years in Europe, Baartman died of tuberculosis, upon which time Georges Cuvier, Napoleon Bonaparte's surgeon, dissected her genitals in an attempt to pinpoint physical proof that Africans

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<sup>353</sup> Janell Hobson, "The 'Batty' Politic: Toward an Aesthetics of the Black Female Body," *Hypatia* 18, no. 4, (Fall/Winter 2003): 87-105.

<sup>354</sup> Strother indicates that, since the earliest identified image of Hottentots, a 1508 woodcut of a man, woman and child by Hans Burgkmair, the *kaross* had come to be the sign of Hottentot identity. Because Burgkmair's work closely resembles recalls a reversed image of Adam and Eve by Dürer from 1504, by associating the couple with the first man and woman, Strother argues that the woodcut suggests "the Hottentots have not made any progress since that early period of expulsion." Strother, "Display", 6.

<sup>355</sup> A Khoisan woman would not have dressed in this way; they would have worn a short *kaross* as a wrapper around the groin. Strother, "Display", 29.

<sup>356</sup> The topic of sexual desire for Baartman was complex. Strother writes that while she was a "*sexed* object," she was not a "sex object," the distinction residing in the presence or absence of desire. Strother, "Display", 17. Though travel writer François Le Vaillant would attempt to depict the Hottentot woman as sexually desirable, his efforts would fail in the end. Images of Baartman capitalized on a history of travel writing and visual representations of the Hottentots, which by the 18<sup>th</sup> century depicted them as "a figure without language, certainly without religion, and dangerously close to being without the capacity for thought itself." Strother, "Display", 13.

were biologically different and therefore inferior to Europeans.<sup>357</sup> Sadly, her job as a performer did not end with death. Until 1974, her genitals, brain and skeleton were preserved and displayed at the Paris National Museum of Natural History (later called Musée de l'Homme) and a postmortem plaster cast of her body was on display until 1982.<sup>358</sup> Her body was not repatriated to South Africa and properly buried until 2002, eight years after the late president of South Africa Nelson Mandela (he served from 1994 to 1999) formally requested (first to French president François Mitterand and then to his successor Jacques Chirac) the return of Baartman's remains.<sup>359</sup> As this discussion shows, Baartman's objectification was laden with violent and sexualized connotations. Musa's reliance on the postmortem cast to depict her emphasizes this violence. He wrote that the cast "is an image of great aggression, extreme violence and I wanted to render that. I introduced Baartman's body into my painting as an object subjected to the gaze, a museum object because that is what she was in life and even after death."<sup>360</sup>

The lines on the map in *Vénus de la Mer du Japon (carte) (Venus Hottentot)* (Figure 3.11) indicate the edges of the island, the curve of rivers, and the borders of the map itself. But they disregard Baartman's shadowy presence and cut across her ghostly form. On the woman's

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<sup>357</sup> Cuvier's desire to examine Baartman's vagina was established with a debate over the hypertrophy of labia minora. Strother outlines this history, which was initiated in 1640, and revolved around whether the condition was due to nature or culture. She writes, "those favoring nature found the condition a heaven-sent boon in finally locating difference in the body itself." Strother, "Display", 21. For an analysis of Cuvier's autopsy report, see Qureshi, "Displaying Sara Baartman", 242-244.

<sup>358</sup> Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 85-89. Strother mentions the display of the plaster cast. See Strother, "Display", 1. Her skeleton and body cast were removed due to complaints from feminists who opposed its degrading representation of women. Qureshi, "Displaying Sara Baartman", 246. For critiques of early ethnographic museum displays in Europe, see Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>359</sup> Eddie Koch, "Bring back the Hottentot Venus," *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 15-22 June 1995, 13.

<sup>360</sup> Musa, "Images Sacrées, Images Politiques: entretien de Lucie Touya et Thierry Koudedji avec Hassan Musa," *africultures*, (August 2005), <http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=4156>, accessed on 12 November 2011. Translation by author. The full quote in French reads: "Je suis parti d'une représentation d'un plâtre moulé sur son corps. C'est une image d'une très grande agressivité, d'une très grande violence et c'est cela que j'ai voulu rendre. J'ai introduit dans mon tableau le corps de Baartman comme un objet de regards, un objet de musée car c'est ce qu'elle a été toute sa vie et même après sa mort."

stomach and chest, Musa painted vaginas with enlarged labias, repetitive signifiers of the 19th-century fascination with Khoisan women and the spectacle Baartman's body represents. But the female genitalia in Musa's painting were actually appropriated from *shunga*, Japanese erotica produced between the late 17th and 18th centuries.<sup>361</sup> Musa explained that he used images from *shunga* because it was thought to be used as a teaching tool for young Japanese brides and thereby stood in opposition to the notion that sexuality and its depictions are shameful.<sup>362</sup> However, the notion that *shunga* was a teaching tool is an interpretation that has been refuted by Timon Screech, who argues that *shunga* was pornography.<sup>363</sup> What is particularly fitting in regards to Musa's appropriation, however, is what Screech refers to as "the scopic regimes of *shunga*," which he reads in terms of both the viewer's gaze onto the image and the exchange of gazes within the images themselves.<sup>364</sup> Voyeurism was a common theme in *shunga* prints that served to heighten the sexual desire of both the depicted figures as well as those looking at the pictures.<sup>365</sup> Screech contextualizes his reading historically and considers *shunga* in relation to the new systems of vision that emerged in Japan in the 18th century. These included the use of lenses, as well as formal devices within the images themselves that emphasized certain details of the pictures. He states that "new methods of seeing...enhanced and altered vision dramatically. The signification of peering, peeping, magnifying and shrinking were all implicated."<sup>366</sup> Musa's appropriation of 18th-century Japanese erotica alongside his reference to race and 19th-century

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<sup>361</sup> Musa appropriates *shunga* in many of his artworks, including paintings and calligraphy, and most often on maps. As in *Vénus de la Mer du Japon (carte) (Venus Hottentot)*, the bodies of the copulating figures disrupt the lines of the map through an integration of viscerality. In addition, as in *Autoportrait en Saint Sebastian*, Musa subjects them to transfiguration. In one painting, for example, the angel Gabriel takes the place of a Japanese man.

<sup>362</sup> Hassan Musa, Interview with the author, Domessargues, France, June 13-15, 2008. The function of *shunga* pictures as sex education is mentioned in Suzanne G. Frayser and Thomas J. Whitby, *Studies in Human Sexuality: A Selected Guide*, 2nd edition (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1995), 646.

<sup>363</sup> Timon Screech, *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan, 1700-1820* (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

pseudo-science is therefore appropriate. In both cases, vision is a mode of acquisition—in the European context, seeing produces knowledge, and in the Japanese context, it produces sexual satisfaction. The case of Baartman suggests that the two go hand in hand. Georges Cuvier believed her “elongated outer labia... would provide anatomical proof of the unrepressed sexuality and essential animal character of the Hottentot.”<sup>367</sup> Beneath this desire to know (and therefore control, suppress) was an anxiety illustrated by Baartman’s caricature, which points to the threat African women posed to the perceived racial purity of Europeans.<sup>368</sup>

*Vénus de la Mer du Japon (carte) (Venus Hottentot)* (Figure 3.11) merges these histories of racial science and erotica through the function of vision. It posits Baartman’s body as an object to be known through examination and display. Musa highlights the violence she was subjected to even further with the integration of the map, which he compares to pornography:

There is something pornographic about maps. It has to do with the pretension of maps to show reality. Pornographic images tend to expose what is supposed to be “the real thing” about sexual behavior while only showing their conformity to one-dimensional and commercially codified norms for a complex human behavior.<sup>369</sup>

And yet here the map is no longer a concrete document that is easily read. Rather, after Musa’s interventions, it has taken on the form of her body. Though the lines on maps are meant to definitively mark borders and boundaries, here they take on the appearance of organic and sometimes corporeal forms like flowers and genitalia. There is an exchange between the

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<sup>367</sup> Clifton C. Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 134.

<sup>368</sup> Anxiety over the preservation of racial purity in the colonies manifested in various ways. Ann Stoler discusses the ways in the “colonizer” and “colonized,” who were figured in terms of race, skin color, religion, class and education, were defined through the attempt to control sexual relationships in the European colonies. See Ann Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 344-373. Zine Magubane argues that colonial representations of black sexuality stemmed from social relations rather than psychological dispositions. See Zine Magubane, “Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the ‘Hottentot Venus,’” *Gender and Society* 15, no. 6 (December 2001): 816-834.

<sup>369</sup> Hassan Musa, “Exchanges: Hassan Musa, Part II,” in *Black Womanhood*, 324-325, quote on 324.

empirical science of mapping and the physicality of Baartman's body. Both reference the rendering of knowledge as visible, and Musa's depiction of Baartman's body brings with it the scopical and medical violence she endured. Musa seems to give Cuvier what he wants—the browns, oranges and dark yellows he uses to render the painting point to seepage of bodily fluids. Essentially, his need to “know” the other here dissolves in a blurring of the map's details, a deconstruction of the body, indeed, its decomposition.

The science of mapping, aligning and fixing the black body is the subject of *Vénus de la Mer du Japon (carte) (Vénus Hottentot)* (Figure 3.11). In the face of these attempts, Musa insists on the slipperiness of “blackness,” which is reflected in his formal processes. Here he infects the map with fluidity as it absorbs messy materiality. Baartman's black body emerges as a site where science attempted to impose rigid classifications, borders and limits. It was a site where these divisions were performed for spectators. But Musa's act of appropriation and re-making has invited seepage from the body, fluidity of history and the slow erasure of classifications. As performance studies scholar and artist E. Patrick Johnson states, “the mutual constructing/deconstructing, avowing/disavowing, and expanding/delimiting dynamic that occurs in the production of blackness is the very thing that constitutes ‘black’ culture.”<sup>370</sup> Johnson describes a black culture that cannot be fixed, for at its core is a push and pull that crushes the possibility of naming an essential blackness. A critical aspect of Musa's engagement with blackness is a critique of historical performances of the black body that constructed static definitions of blackness, or that re-asserted projections about blackness from the outside. Or, as in the case of Josephine Baker, Musa is interested in how the performance of blackness was itself a re-appropriation by black subjects, which produced conflicting results.

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<sup>370</sup> E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

In Musa's 2003 *Autoportrait Avec Idées Noires* (Self-portrait with Dark Thoughts) (Figure 3.12), the artist sits between Baker and Baartman to argue that just as they were made to perform "Africa," so is he. However, Musa's approach to painting the three figures distinguishes himself from the two women. Musa painted Baker and Baartman in monotone grays with minimal detail against a white backdrop. In contrast, he presents himself with rich colors in a pose associated with classic portraiture: he sits with his body tilted in a three-quarter view in front of a black background. Unlike his modern attire, the women are bare, emphasizing the visual significance of their physicality in their performances of blackness. Indeed, both appropriations are in keeping with the circumstances of the women's historical reception, whereby their physical features were seen as inextricably tied to a particular black female identity. For Baartman, Musa incorporates the indexical image of her postmortem body; for Baker, he appropriates a famous photograph by Stanislaus Walery of Baker in her "banana skirt" at the Folies Bergère (Figure 3.15).

Ideologies about race set the stage for Baker and figured in the way she mirrored blackness.<sup>371</sup> Baker was born in 1906 in St. Louis, Missouri, performed in New York City vaudeville shows, and then moved to Paris in 1925 with *La Revue Nègre*, where she found fame in the music hall scene.<sup>372</sup> Having witnessed race riots in East St. Louis as a young girl in 1917 and being subjected to racism both on and off stage, Baker was well versed in the politics of race. Though ideologically linked, racism figured differently in France. While it was in the midst of colonial conquest in the 1930s, comparative literature scholar Eileen Julien writes of the "legend

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<sup>371</sup> Sharpley-Whiting writes that "knowing nothing particularly about Africa, let alone the sexual proclivities of African women, Josephine Baker re-created the Africa, African woman, and African American woman that the French could readily identify as such, along with a 'le jazz hot' twist." Sharpley-Whiting, NEED FULL CITATION, 108.

<sup>372</sup> *La Revue Nègre* was an American production conceived of by Caroline Dudley Reagan, "a liberal white New Yorker and socialite" as "a Harlem export for Europe." See Jeanne Scheper, "Of la Baker, I am a Disciple": The Diva Politics of Reception," *Camera Obscura* 65, no. 2 (2007): 74.

of French openness” that prompted many African Americans to leave United States.<sup>373</sup> Historian Tyler Stovall explained it further when he indicated that “when the French looked at black Americans, they saw a new version of the sensuous, spontaneous African.”<sup>374</sup> Baker created her own version of this figure as she juxtaposed African and African American stereotypes and physical comedy against her striking beauty and energetic dancing. She even performed the “primitive” in her personal life, as evidenced by her acceptance of the gift of a cheetah by Henri Varna, the owner of a club called Casino de Paris where she performed.<sup>375</sup> Additionally, Sociologist Bennetta Jules-Rosette writes that she used the minstrel tradition of blackface as a resource for her performances.<sup>376</sup> Baker was therefore engaging two histories of racialization, one that stemmed from Europe’s colonial history and the other from the historical American context of slavery and the subsequent racial inequities that she knew intimately.<sup>377</sup> Her performances reside in the space of conscious slippage between these two contexts.

Her fame also came from her sexualized performances, which were seen as simultaneously erotic and exotic. Her arrival in France was perfectly timed with the Parisian obsession with blackness called *negrophilia*. Petrine Archer-Shaw writes that the Parisian “love”

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<sup>373</sup> Eileen Julien, “Now You See it, Now You Don’t: Josephine Baker’s Films of the 1930s and the Problem of Color,” in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, eds., Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton and Stephen Small (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 49. African Americans like the playwright Victor Séjour and painter Henry Ossawa Tanner had been immigrating to Paris as early as the 19th century. In 1925, jazz musician Sidney Bechet traveled with Baker as part of *La Revue Nègre*. Other notable émigrés include Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Duke Ellington, and Dizzy Gillespie. For a detailed account of African-American writers in Paris in the 19th and 20th centuries, see Michel Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

<sup>374</sup> Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 33.

<sup>375</sup> See Victoria and Albert Museum, “Josephine Baker and her Cheetah,” *Victoria and Albert Museum*, accessed December 16, 2009, [http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1157\\_art\\_deco/about/](http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1157_art_deco/about/).

<sup>376</sup> Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life*, 57. The author describes how even African-American performers put on blackface, for doing so allowed for better paid engagements in white-owned theaters where audiences assumed the performers were white. See Bryan Hammond and Patrick O’Connor, *Josephine Baker* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988).

<sup>377</sup> Baker describes her impressions of the race riots in the opening pages of her autobiography. See Josephine Baker and Jo Bouillon, *Josephine*, trans. by Mariana Fitzpatrick (New York: Paragon House, 1977). For analyses about the riots, see Eliot Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917* (New York: Atheneum, 1972) and Charles Lumpkins, *American Pogrom: The East St. Louis Race Riot and Black Politics* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008).

of black culture stemmed from a view of it as primitive. To the French, the primitive suggested an idyllic life that contrasted to the traumatizing mechanized battlefields of WWI. “Being called a negrophile affirmed [Parisians’] defiant craze for black culture and ‘blackness’ was a sign of their modernity.”<sup>378</sup> In her popular *La Revue Nègre*, she and dancer Joe Alex performed the *Danse sauvage*, dazzling European audiences by giving them a version of Africa they perceived as real: sexualized and savage (Figure 3.16).<sup>379</sup> In describing *La Revue Nègre*, the dance critic André Levinson referred to her as a “black Venus”: “certain of Miss Baker’s poses, back arched, haunches protruding, arms entwined and uplifted in a phallic symbol, had the compelling potency of the finest examples of Negro sculpture. The plastic sense of a race of sculptors and the frenzy of the African Eros swept over the audience.”<sup>380</sup> Levinson’s use of the term “black Venus” referenced Charles Baudelaire’s relationship with Jeanne Duval, a Haitian woman he described in his poems as *la Vénus noire*.<sup>381</sup> Levinson’s explicit references to African sexuality are illustrative of Baker’s reception in France, which she exploited by incorporating risqué costumes, such as pink feather loincloths, palm fronds, and banana skirts; and props and dance styles that signified “primitive” into her performances. Indeed, representations of the black

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<sup>378</sup> Petrine Archer-Shaw, “Black Intentions,” *Art Review* 52 (November 2000): 46-7.

<sup>379</sup> For some members of her French audiences, because of her American background, Baker was not “African” enough. When she was elected “Queen of the Colonies” for the 1931 French Colonial Exhibition, the Exhibition Committee received many letters complaining that she was not a product of Africa. For some, even her straightened hair was evidence of a lack of authenticity. See Lynn Haney, *Naked at the Feast: A Biography of Josephine Baker* (New York: Robson Books, 1981), 185. Sadiya Qureshi explains that even in the 19th century, European audiences were very conscious of “ethnic differences between peoples of the same colour, differences of which the public was not only aware but which showmen capitalized upon.” Qureshi’s contribution to the literature on Sara Baartman points to the heterogeneity of the black population in Europe of which people were aware. She warns against the possibility of reifying Baartman when she is considered out of her historical context. See Qureshi, “Displaying Sara Baartman,” 240-241.

<sup>380</sup> Joan Acocella and Lynn Garafola, eds., *Andre Levinson on Dance: Writings from Paris in the Twenties* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, University Press of New England, 1991), 74. (Originally published in *Theatre Arts Monthly*, April 1927).

<sup>381</sup> For a discussion of Baudelaire and the black Venus, see T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, “Black is the Difference: Identity, Colonialism and Fetishism in *La Belle Dorothée*,” in *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 62-70.

Venus, both visual and literary, seemed to promise her “adeptness at sexual arts.”<sup>382</sup> Baker’s black skin and lithe body preoccupied her reviewers, and her physical attributes were emphasized, exaggerated, and sexualized in image-based representations, as in Paul Colin’s lithographs of the topless performer in her famously suggestive banana skirt (Figure 3.17).<sup>383</sup> Such representations worked to establish her iconography.

Though Baker consciously subscribed to and performed a particular definition of African-ness through her appropriations, she was also critical of films that denied bi-racial coupling and was known to argue with filmmakers about plots that consistently ended with her character not getting her (white) man.<sup>384</sup> Baker was still subjected to contemporary social mores, in this case the taboo of interracial sexual relations. Nonetheless, she was able to negotiate her career, finances, and personal life in ways Baartman was not. As I have suggested here, there is evidence that suggests Baker consciously deployed and exploited racial signifiers in order to advance her career as a performer.<sup>385</sup> Musa is conscious of Baker’s complicated subject position and the maneuvers she employed to contest and navigate the complicated landscape of sex, race and performance in early 20th century Paris. He integrates Baker into his self-portraits in order to capitalize on the contradiction between the representations that sought to fix her within a certain conception of African-ness and a the more fluid notion of identity that he espouses.

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<sup>382</sup> Yet there was ambivalence about black female sexuality, which Sharpley-Whiting describes: the black Venus’ “lure was loathed also, for she represented danger, a sexual passion capable of satiation and consumption, the literal siphoning off of life through the draining of precious seminal liquor.” T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, “Black is the Difference,” 56.

<sup>383</sup> For example, see Pierre de Regnier, “La Revue Nègre,” *Candide* (12 November 1925). For an analysis of Colin’s imagery, see P. Archer Straw, “Nègrophilia, Paris 1925: A Study in the Artistic interest in and Appropriation of Negro Cultural forms in that period,” (PhD diss., Courtauld Institute, 1994), 177-8, 186-200.

<sup>384</sup> Phyllis Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 162.

<sup>385</sup> See Michael Borshuk, “An Intelligence of the Body: Disruptive Parody through Dance in the Early Performances of Josephine Baker,” in *Embodying Liberation: The Black Body in American Dance*, eds. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Alison D. Goeller (Hamburg: Lit and Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 55.

*Autoportrait Avec Idées Noires* (Figure 3.12) offers some insight into how Musa himself negotiates his blackness. As a self-portrait, the painting suggests that Musa is haunted by dark thoughts: the figures of Baartman and Baker. This implies a reflective relationship between Musa and the two women. His character is not akin to any of the characters Baker played: the clown, the sex symbol, the glamour queen, the African primitive, the diva; nor does he perform Baartman, a woman with seemingly little agency, victimized even after death. Rather, the stern, almost angry look on his face is defiant. Fittingly, he refers to his paintings as his “line of defense.”<sup>386</sup> His furrowed brow emphasizes the wrinkle between his eyebrows, the mark of serious engagement in thought. He sits with his torso and head facing right while his eyes gaze just left of center. Prominent laugh lines belie an unsmiling mouth encircled by a salt-and-pepper gray moustache and closely trimmed beard. Gold, brown, yellow and orange define his wrinkled skin, bulging veins, and the contours on his face and neck. Though he is dressed casually in a tee shirt for this classic three-quarter length self-portrait, all other elements of a formal portrait are set: a black backdrop, dramatic light sources, even suggestions of a window above his head. He is a self-contained figure looking to the viewer with slight antagonism and suspicion. Thus, his “thoughts” are discordant to his psychology and demeanor. The black backdrop hovers around Musa so as to separate him from the otherworldliness that is the realm of projected and performed representations, but there is still a bothersome rupture between his complex sensibilities and the women’s flattened facades.

Even to the unknowing viewer, there seems to be more at stake between Musa and the two portraits than simple reflection. The way in which Musa generated his depiction of Baartman and Baker in *Autoportrait Avec Idées Noires* is revealing. As mentioned earlier, he based his

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<sup>386</sup> Musa, “Images Sacrées, Images Politiques,” n.p., translated by author.

rendition of Baartman on a cast made of her body post mortem. For Baker, he produced a large stencil outline based on the Walery photograph and roughly shaded his depictions of both women. Musa's approach emphasizes the distance between his renderings and the "original" body. That is, his representations of representations, unlike the cast and the photograph, do not seek to index the black female bodies. Rather, Musa's appropriated representations are like ghostly traces that depict the violence enacted upon the women. There is an element of removal from and mediation of the "original" body and an insistence on the painterly performance of the artist. I would argue that Musa's approach engages the initial performance of blackness enacted by each woman and extrapolates a performative blackness that is central to defining the identity of each woman and of Musa. In other words, Baker and Baartman were (among other things) productions of a projected blackness, which was then re-produced, however mediated, in their respective performances and representations. Ideologies are both imposed on *and* produced by racialized subjects. Musa's self-portrait is simultaneously an allusion to this performance of blackness and his attempt to engage and mediate it once more.

The title quote "dark thoughts" comes from Musa's text "Qui a Inventé les Africains?" (Who Invented the Africans?), in which he describes an encounter during *Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa*, an art exhibition held during *africa95*, a nationwide season of events focused on African arts and cultures in the United Kingdom in 1995.<sup>387</sup> The exhibition contributes to the history of identity exhibitions in the U.S. and Europe, engaging particularly with the binary of traditional versus contemporary African art described in Chapter Two. In fact,

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<sup>387</sup> Musa, "Qui a Inventé les Africains?" *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* exhibited at the Whitechapel Art Gallery from 27 September to November 26, 1995 and traveled to the Malmö Kunsthalle in Sweden (January 27–March 17, 1996). *africa95* included visual art, film, performing arts, literature, music, public debate, and programs on BBC television and radio. *Seven Stories* was conceived of as part of a series of parallel events to the art exhibition *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, which, in contrast to *Seven Stories*, purported to represent the whole of the continent. For information about *africa95*, see "Africa95," *Archives Hub: at the centre of great research*, accessed November 23, 2011, <http://archiveshub.ac.uk/features/050527r1.html>. A special issue of *African Arts* on *africa95* was published during Summer 1996 (volume 29, no. 3).

the exhibition preceded the work of Enwezor, Hassan and Oguibe. Co-organizer and curator Clémentine Deliss indicates this engagement, while referencing the theft of objects during the colonial period and their current display in European museums. She wrote that the exhibition sought to engage the

dominant discourse on “African art” in which historical material-objects, often anonymous and sometimes illegally acquired-continues to provide the basis for the exchange of large amounts of money, commercial speculation, and academic research; at the same time, little regard is given the current manifestations of named, living, and self-conscious artists in Africa today.<sup>388</sup>

Musa was one of 130 artists who participated *Seven Stories*. His experience in postcolonial Sudan primed a critique of the ways in which African identity was presented in the exhibition and among other participating artists. He discusses a particular encounter with some artists, writing that though they had never lived in Africa, they claimed an authentic African identity, all the while denying the same status for Arabs in North Africa.<sup>389</sup> Musa described the artists in a phrase replete with metaphors: “they were black, they had dark thoughts and they wore dark glasses to see only the dark part of the universe and they believed that this allowed them to reorganize Africa.”<sup>390</sup> Musa’s mention of the reorganization of Africa is a reference to the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, during which European powers came together to decide the fate of Africa, in which the continent was carved up in preparation for European colonization.<sup>391</sup> Musa therefore connects processes of essentialization inherent to *ArtAfricanism* to those harbored by European colonialists.

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<sup>388</sup> Clémentine Deliss, “Returning the Curve: africa95, Tenq, and ‘Seven Stories,’” *African Arts* 29, no. 3, special issue: africa95 (Summer 1996): 36-47, 96, 38-39.

<sup>389</sup> Hassan Musa, “Qui a Inventé les Africains?,” 62, translation by author.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid. Hassan Musa critiques curator of African art Susan Vogel for perpetuating such a view in Musa, “Qui a Inventé les Africains?,” 66. Also see Picton, “In Vogue” and Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern,” in *Reading the Contemporary: African art from theory to the marketplace* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 48-73.

<sup>391</sup> See Muriel Evelyn Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Harlow, England; New York: Longman, 2010).

While Musa's full quote is not included in *Autoportrait Avec Idées Noires*, the painting still challenges the singularity and insularity of such "dark thoughts." Stuart Hall has indicated that the notion of an essential "black experience" played an important role in post-colonial struggles and provided the basis for political and cultural movements.<sup>392</sup> But Musa's critique points to the danger of such ideas, which suggest that authenticity is inherent to a notion of identity that is impervious to change. Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah argued for an opposing position on change: "Trying to find some primordially authentic culture can be like peeling an onion... Societies without change aren't authentic; they're just dead."<sup>393</sup> Musa's painting presents a critique of essentialism by drawing from a number of historical moments in which an essential Africa has been performed in various ways—Sara Baartman and ethnographic displays of humans, Josephine Baker's conscious appropriations of racialized representations, and contemporary African artists who feed and buy into the trope of authenticity to validate their inclusion in the category of "African artist." Though Musa's critique involves the appropriation of projections of blackness, he does so in order to insist on a performance of identity that is heterogeneous. What is so provocative about the painting is that despite his insistence, Musa seems haunted (as Verwoert would likely argue) by Baartman and Baker. Through his

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<sup>392</sup> Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 223. Hall referred to Franz Fanon, who wrote that the rediscovery of [indigenous] identity is "a passionate search... directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others. See Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 170).

<sup>393</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Case for Contamination," *New York Times*, January 1, 2006, accessed November 12, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/01/magazine/01cosmopolitan.html?pagewanted=all>. He writes, "the textiles most people think of as traditional West African cloths are known as Java prints; they arrived in the 19th century with the Javanese batiks sold, and often milled, by the Dutch. The traditional garb of Herero women in Namibia derives from the attire of 19th-century German missionaries, though it is still unmistakably Herero, not least because the fabrics used have a distinctly un-Lutheran range of colors. And so with our *kente* cloth: the silk was always imported, traded by Europeans, produced in Asia. This tradition was once an innovation. Should we reject it for that reason as untraditional? How far back must one go? Should we condemn the young men and women of the University of Science and Technology, a few miles outside Kumasi, who wear European-style gowns for graduation, lined with *kente* strips (as they do now at Howard and Morehouse, too)? Cultures are made of continuities and changes, and the identity of a society can survive through these changes. Societies without change aren't authentic; they're just dead."

appropriations, he re-lives and re-enacts their performances even while he distances himself through critique. Much like the gleaners, the representations take on a life of their own, both through and beyond him.

Unlike Baartman or Baker, Musa is an agent of self-representation in *Autoportrait Avec Idées Noires*. But whereas Musa paid a great deal of attention to detailing his face and upper torso, his arms and hands are rendered with loose brushstrokes that border on abstraction. Here Musa makes apparent the ambiguity of agency. Blurring into the rest of his body, his hands are rendered formless. He has denied himself the crucial ability of painting. This act of repudiation or disavowal parallels Baartman and Baker, for to some extent, each woman was denied agency.<sup>394</sup> Musa expresses this denial in his painting—while Baartman is depicted without her legs and possibility of mobility, with only half her head in the painting, Baker is denied the crucial ability of thought. However, the painting does not let contemporary viewers off the hook. Musa pictures the projections and representations he must perform and negotiates his own act of self-representation, no matter how restrictive the available signifiers might seem to be. Just like Baker and Baartman, he is on display.

Given Musa's representation of injured and wrapped hands in *Total Happiness (glaneuses)* (Figure 3.8), Musa's use of abstraction to depict his own hands is significant. In both cases—injured or without fingers—they are unable to function. As a painter and creator of representations, hands are the locus of his power and to depict himself without the ability to use them essentially takes this power away. The bandages in *Total Happiness (glaneuses)*, however, indicate the possibility of healing. In *The Art of Healing* (2002) (Figure 3.18), Musa again painted Josephine Baker using the stencil, this time representing her with a bandaged hand and

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<sup>394</sup> Sharpley-Whiting writes that Baker was “simultaneously locked into a derogatory and objectified essence of black femaleness.” Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus*, 107.

foot. As in *Total Happiness (glaneuses)*, they appear in multiples. Musa treated the fabric by deepening and altering its color from golden yellow at the top of the canvas to increasing shades of brown. While the flowers in the fabric dominate the top and bottom of the painting, Musa deleted most of the flowers using his wax process around Baker's legs. Musa painted a small portion of the right side of the canvas using dark greens that verge on black, transforming the once-flat surface of the fabric into an architectural space. A master of painterly illusion, Musa's painting therefore depicts Baker stepping outside of a dark space as she looks back smiling at where she once was. Musa gives no specific information about where she emerged from, aside from its darkness, which we can read metaphorically especially in juxtaposition with the golden yellow brightness that surrounds her head and manifests below her head. She seems, in fact, to be stepping into the process of being bandaged, as though moving from a place of injury to one of healing. The temporality implied by the transformative action of stepping into healing is emphasized by the hands and feet, which are here clearly depicted in the process of being wrapped.

### **Abstracting Race: a fitting conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that Hassan Musa's critique of the essentializing processes of the art world, what he describes as *ArtAfricanism*, manifest through his appropriations of historical figures whose bodies have been inscribed with their identity. Whether with Baker's primitivism, Baartman's hyper-sexuality, or the *glaneuses'* primitive simplicity, Musa shows that processes of representation attempt to serve the project of fixing identities. In contrast, his images demonstrate the fluidity of identities through a diachronic examination of historical figures like Saint Sebastian and Che Guevara, people famed for their ideological martyrdom. His

approach to representing bodies in *There are No Tigers in Africa* (2010) (Figure 3.19), where Musa uses only fabric to depict a vicious scene borrowed from Eugène Delacroix's *Tiger Attacking an Indian Woman* (1856) (Figure 3.20), is therefore telling.<sup>395</sup> Erasing the forest in which Delacroix depicted the woman's demise, Musa layered several pieces of cloth to depict the act of destruction upon a blood-red ground that edged on the right with strips of red-and-white stripes and black-and-gold geometric design. Musa staggered this "canvas" upon a larger assemblage of textiles, producing an irregularly shaped artwork consisting of two different-sized rectangular and overlapping fields. With its staggered edges, the resulting artwork recalls a tattered flag. While Musa's flag is void of the swaths of colors and geometric shapes typically used to identify nation-states, he uses culturally suggestive patterns to indicate whose flag it might be. The red-and-white refers to the U.S. flag, while black-and-gold geometric patterns generically reference Africa. A bit of Chinese blue silk extends from top left towards the middle of the work and on the right edge of the outer frame, Musa sewed in a strip of fabric that features koi fish, a type of carp domesticated and bred for its decorative coloring in Japan.<sup>396</sup> While Musa's reference to several places and their attendant cultures supports his insistence on the right to all visual cultures and art histories, the strength of the work lies in the way pattern conjures culture in an everyday object like fabric. In this way, he highlights the prosaic existence of relationship between images, whether drawn from popular culture or art history, and representations of culture.

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<sup>395</sup> Musa has produced a series of paintings related to *There are No Tigers in Africa*. They include *Cows Don't Bite Cowboys*, *Les Imperialistes Chinois Sont Des Tigres en Papier*, *Soyinka Mordu Par Un Tigre*, *Un Black Mordu Par Un Tigre*, *Mao Mordu Par Un Tigre* (all from 2010-2011). In each, a tiger, whether spotted like a cow or covered with leopard or zebra print, attacks Osama Bin Laden, an anonymous figure, Wole Soyinka, Barack Obama, and Mao Zedong, respectively.

<sup>396</sup> For a history of koi fish and its domestication in Japan see Nick Fletcher, *The Ultimate Koi* (Dorking Surrey: Interpet, 1999), especially "Chapter 2: Historical Background," 24-28.

In true form, Musa collapses many references into this assemblage. Musa's mention of the tiger in the title refers to the Nigerian novelist and Nobel Prize winner for literature Wole Soyinka, who in 1962 famously stated that "a tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces."<sup>397</sup> Soyinka was critiquing the postcolonial movement *Négritude*, which promoted the notion of an essential African identity and its representation in art, literature and culture at large, and which figured in important ways in postcolonial nationalist struggles.<sup>398</sup> Though the statement seems like one Musa could support, he shoots Soyinka down for using a stereotype about Africa, explaining that "there are no tigers in Africa," a title that shifts Delacroix's Indian scene to Africa. Without depicting details, Musa abstracts both the human and the animal, using patterns with cultural references. He uses leopard print to create the human (there are leopards in Africa) and a Victorian floral print for the tiger, thereby indirectly referencing colonial Britain and the textile trade. The narrative transforms to tell about the destruction of the African at the

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<sup>397</sup> Quoted in Mineke Schipper, "Negritude, Black Consciousness, and Beyond," in Imagining Insiders: African and the Question of Belonging (London: Cassell, 1999), 82. Later, Soyinka explained what he meant: "A tiger does not stand in the forest and say: 'I am a tiger.' When you pass where a tiger has walked before, you see the skeleton of the duiker, you know that some tigritude has been emanated there... the distinction I was trying to make at this conference was a purely literary one: I was saying that what one expected from poetry was an intrinsic quality, not a mere name-dropping." See Janheinz Jahn, A History of Neo-African Literature, trans. Oliver Coburn and Ursula Lehrburger, (London: Faber, 1968), 265-6.

<sup>398</sup> Négritude was an intellectual and cultural movement started by poet and first president of Senegal Léopold Senghor, the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, and the Guianan Léon Damas, who met in Paris in the 1930s. It proposed a unified black identity in opposition to European colonialism and western domination. While early on, Césaire worked to recognize the collective experience of colonialism and the slave trade, Senghor later promoted Négritude as a way to express African traditions and ideas by developing a so-called African aesthetic. In the Americas, W. E. B. Du Bois sought to confront the fragmentation, oppression, and dispossession of the transatlantic slave trade through racial organization and notion of a real or imagined return to Africa. See W. E. B. Du Bois, "Pan-Africa and the New Racial Philosophy," in Marcus Pohlman, ed., Integration vs. Separatism: The Colonial Era to 1945: African American Political Thought (London: Routledge, 2003), 254-258, originally published in *Crisis* 40 (November 1933). For a discussion of Senghor's Négritude, see Leopold Sedar Senghor, "Negritude: A Humanista of the Twentieth Century," in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 27-35. For Césaire's critique on colonialism, see "From Discourse on Colonialism," excerpted in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, 172-180. For a critical reading of pan-Africanism and Négritude, see Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1968); Stanislaus Adotevi, African Culture: Algiers Symposium: First Pan-African Cultural Festival (Algiers: Société Nationale d'Édition et de Diffusion, 1969); Albert Franklin, "La Négritude: Réalité ou Mystification," *Présence Africaine* 14 (1952): 287-303.

hands of Britain. Musa's decision to depict the African as an animal references histories such as that of Sara Baartman, who was seen as subhuman.

Though it is tempting to argue that Musa's treatment of the UK similarly posits its association with the natural, Britain's history of exporting textiles to its colonial outposts more appropriately situates it within the context of capitalist material culture and colonialism. Historian Nuala Zahedieh, for example, writes about Britain's international textile market from as early as the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>399</sup> In a deft move, Musa's artwork points simultaneously to Britain's colonial exploits in both India and Africa, which were connected through Britain's use of Indian people as indentured servants in Southern Africa.<sup>400</sup> Musa pushes the colonial subtext even further with his appropriation of Delacroix. As an Orientalist painter, he often set his sights on the exotic, whether the "tigers, panthers, jaguars, [and] lions" that "stirred [him] so much," or non-European women who were often sexualized, as with *Mulatto Woman* (1821) (Figure 3.21) and *Odalisque* (1857) (Figure 3.22) or subjected to violence as in *The Abduction of Rebecca* (1846) (Figure 3.23) or, in the case of *Female Nude Killed From Behind* (1827) (Figure 3.24), both.<sup>401</sup> Linda Nochlin's analysis of Orientalist paintings from the mid-19th century describes a tight relationship between painted representations of "the Orient" in the context of the Algerian struggle against French colonial rule. She argues that "Orientalist painting managed to body forth two ideological assumptions about power: one about men's power over women; the

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<sup>399</sup> Nuala Zahedieh, "London and the Colonial Consumer in the Late Seventeenth Century," *The Economic History Review* 47, no. 2 (May, 1994): 239-261. Also see John Singleton, *The World Textile Industry* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>400</sup> Eric Louw, "Ethnic Conflicts: Southern Africa," in *Encyclopedia of the Developing World, Volume 1*, ed. Thomas M. Leonard (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 621.

<sup>401</sup> In Delacroix's journal, the painter ventured to guess why he was so interested in these animals: "Can it be because I have gone outside the everyday thoughts that are my world/ away from the street that is my entire universe? How necessary it is to give oneself a shake from time to time; to stick one's head out of doors and try to read from the book of life that has nothing in common with cities and the works of man. No doubt about it, excursion has done me good and has made me feel better and calmer." Hubert Wellington, ed., *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, trans. Lucy Norton (London: Phaidon Press, 1951), 56.

other about white men's superiority to, hence justifiable control over, inferior, darker races."<sup>402</sup>

Delacroix demonstrates these ideologies in one painting, bringing several themes that recur throughout his oeuvre—predatory animals, bare-breasted “darker” women, and violence.

Furthermore, by taking on India as the subject of his painting, he illustrates an affinity with the colonial role of the British, who were ruling over India via the British East India Company at the time.<sup>403</sup>

It is fitting that the self-portrait of Musa I began the chapter with betrayed no hint of his likeness. His reference to the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian and Che Guevara enables him to use the genre to describe *ArtAfricanism*, a market-based system of representation that validates certain African identities and art forms over others. His references to Josephine Baker and Sara Baartman bring to the conversation the issue of performance and identity, an identity that is inscribed on the body through often violent means. Through his appropriations of these historical figures and reference to the ways in which processes of image-making and dissemination contributed to both their life circumstances and the ideologies that shaped their reception, he posits a critique of the art world. In both his visual art and writings, he argues that the art exhibition is similarly a mode of representation that relies heavily on the notion of authentic non-European American identities. He develops this critique through a deep engagement with the conceptual and formal aspects of contemporary and historical images, which he carefully chooses from art histories, particularly that of Europe. But he does not limit himself to the “high”

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<sup>402</sup> Linda Nochlin, “The Imaginary Orient,” *Art in America* 71, no. 5 (May 1983): 125.

<sup>403</sup> For a discussion of the British East India Company, see James M. Vaughn, “The Politics of Empire: Metropolitan Socio-political Development and the Imperial Transformation of the British East India Company, 1675–1775 (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2009); Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1985); H.V. Bowen, Margarete Lincoln and Nigel Rigby, eds., *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Rochester, NY: Brewer, 2003); Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman, 1993); Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

arts and instead sees images, whether photographs featured on magazine covers, mass-produced fabric patterned in kitsch, or even how-to diagrams that appear on product packaging, as a resource for his critical dialogues on identity and representation.

## CHAPTER 4

### Tarek Al-Ghoussein

All conflicts prefer symbols.<sup>404</sup>  
-Mourid Barghouti

In *Untitled 2 (Self Portrait Series) (Looking at Palestine)* (2003) (Figure 1.5), a figure played by the artist Tarek Al-Ghoussein stands on an outcropping with his back to the viewer looking across the Dead Sea at the hills of Palestine. He is dressed in black with his head wrapped in a *keffiyeh*, the black-and-white scarf associated with Palestine. According to Al-Ghoussein, he produced this particular series as “a commentary on contemporary Western media representations of the Palestinian as terrorist.”<sup>405</sup> I locate his critique in the unease with which he plays the part. There is a melancholy in *Untitled 2 (Self Portrait Series) (Looking at Palestine)* that does not conform to typical depictions of a terrorist. Al-Ghoussein is himself a Palestinian who nonetheless does not possess the privilege of entering his homeland.<sup>406</sup> With this bit of biography, the photograph, indeed Al-Ghoussein’s practice in general, has most often been read in terms of the powerful longing inherent to exile and its prevalence in the Palestinian national

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<sup>404</sup> Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, trans. Ahdaf Soueif (Cairo, New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 143.

<sup>405</sup> Darat al Funun, “The Wall & the Check Points: Tarek al Ghoussein,” accessed February 17, 2011, <http://www.daratalfunun.org/main/activit/curentl/febo6/tarek/tarek06.html>.

<sup>406</sup> Palestinians have varied access to Palestine depending on the passport they carry. For the most part, Israel does not allow refugees in neighboring Arab countries entry, and Palestinians with European or American passports are usually given tourist visas (though they are sometimes denied entry). See Juliane Hammer, *Palestinians Born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a Homeland* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 16.

narrative. Comparative literature scholar Hamid Dabashi describes Al-Ghoussein as a “photographer of a loss he never possessed, a visual chronicler of a dispossession historically flaunted at him.”<sup>407</sup> Others offer similar readings: in his work there is a “continuous sense of displacement and loneliness;” it is “a sustained meditation on place, identity, mobility and belonging;” his photographs are “existential,” “as if the artist were grasping at a place in the universe rather than just a legitimate geopolitical location.”<sup>408</sup>

Al-Ghoussein encourages readings of his work as a reflection of his exilic Palestinian identity in the short descriptions he writes about each of his series (to which I refer throughout the chapter). Yet while he readily cites the influence of photographers such as Lee Friedlander and Robert Frank, and while the influence of his professor at the University of New Mexico Patrick Nagatani is clearly evidenced by his use of staging, Al-Ghoussein’s engagement with strategies in art making has not been the subject of much attention. In contrast, here I show how Al-Ghoussein relies on subjective documentary photography, postmodern representations of identity and staged photography to examine Palestinian iconography, which I define as the images produced by Palestinian artists and writers to illustrate their situation after the dispossession in 1948 with the founding of the nation state of Israel. Among other symbols, stones, demolished houses, walls and the *keffiyeh* share space with Al-Ghoussein in the photographs, but their relationship is uncertain. This, I argue, is Al-Ghoussein’s ambiguous relationship to the dominant narrative of Palestinian identity. Related is the fraught issue of land, with which he engages through the genre of landscape photography. Here I rely on texts that

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<sup>407</sup> Hamid Dabashi, “Tarek Al-Ghoussein Does Not Exist,” in *Tarek Al-Ghoussein In Absentia* (Singapore: Page One Publishing Pte Ltd, 2009), 10.

<sup>408</sup> George Katodrytis, “Tarek Al-Ghoussein,” in *Sharjah International Biennial 6* (Sharjah, UAE: Department of Culture and Information, 2003). Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “Beautiful Anguish,” *The National*, 18 April 2008, 8; S.T., “Art, diplomatically deployed,” *The Economist*, April 19, 2011, accessed August 2, 2012, [http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2011/04/tarek\\_al-ghoussein](http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2011/04/tarek_al-ghoussein).

posit representations of landscape in relationship to national identity. Al-Ghoussein's landscapes differ significantly from those that depict the land as verdant and fertile. Photographing in the deserts of the United Arab Emirates, he references a tradition in Palestinian art and literature to depict the narrative of the loss of Palestine in terms of a barren desert. Staging the scenes he photographs, he metaphorically constructs his national identity from exile. While the linking of exile and desert has great symbolic weight, it also stems from actual experience, for since the loss of Palestine in 1948, a large number of Palestinians sought refuge in the Gulf countries, whose developing economies upon the discovery of oil gave them an opportunity to earn a living. Al-Ghoussein's experience contributes to this history, for he too lives in the Gulf.

Al-Ghoussein is quite open about his views on identity and belonging. In an interview with fellow Palestinian artist Emily Jacir, he stated,

when I introduce myself as a Palestinian, some have been quick to ask, how I identify myself as such when I speak Arabic with a foreign accent and I have never been to the country...People often mistake me for being American because of my accent...but try to convince an immigration officer in the USA of that [sic].<sup>409</sup>

Later, in response to further questions about a series of photographs that reference the "separation wall," he said,

...I felt like a hypocrite showing a piece that addresses the wall...I felt that I had no "right" to make a work in response to the wall in Palestine because I was not living there and thus did not suffer the consequences of it like so many Palestinians. You argued that my experience was one of many Palestinian experiences and that I did have the "right" to address these issues, especially considering the fact that I am forbidden from ever entering. The talk resulted in a small "epiphany" for me.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> Tarek Al-Ghoussein, "Artist Conversation with Emily Jacir," in *Tarek Al-Ghoussein In Absentia*, 26. Edward Said tells a similar story in his memoir. See Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 5.

<sup>410</sup> Al-Ghoussein, "Artist Conversation with Emily Jacir," 26.

Al-Ghoussein's comments evidence an approach to identity that is contingent upon a test of authenticity to which he subjects himself.<sup>411</sup> In this case, an authentic Palestinian identity is based on living there and speaking the language, characteristics that do not take into account the history of expulsion and generations of Palestinians who have grown up in diaspora. But overriding these prerequisites to possession of an authentic Palestinian identity is "suffering." In a clear act of blaming the victim, Al-Ghoussein indicates that he does not have the right to represent aspects of the Palestinian story without having directly experienced it, from which derives his conflicted sense of what it means to be Palestinian. While the space of Palestine has become a privileged site from which to claim Palestinian identity, as Palestinian authors in exile such as Edward Said, Liana Badr and Mourid Barghouti have shown, it is also produced from the outside, among communities who, despite their inability to go home, have maintained a sense of their identity. Reading these three authors together, I see the Palestinian identity they illustrate as conflicted and often contradictory. For example, Therese Saliba has read Badr's novels as part of the "continuous reconstruction of the national narrative [that] produces a transnationalism rooted in the definition of the ethno-nation—'Palestinians wherever they may be.'"<sup>412</sup> In contrast, Said writes about his own sense of estrangement, indicating that feeling out of place is "a form of freedom...even if I am far away from being totally convinced that it is. That skepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so many dissonances in my life I have

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<sup>411</sup> Hammer confirms that Al-Ghoussein's feelings are widespread. Palestinians who live in Palestine and have suffered the occupation often see diaspora Palestinians as "cowards and traitors who left the country alone in difficult circumstances." Hammer, *Palestinians Born in Exile*, 21.

<sup>412</sup> Liana Badr is an author who participated in resistance from exile. Her feminist texts tell stories based on her own biography as well as oral histories and fictional narratives. Therese Saliba, "A Country Beyond Reach," in *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels*, eds. Lisa Suhair Majaj, Paula W. Sunderman and Therese Saliba (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 160. The statement "the State of Palestine is the state of Palestinians wherever they may be" is a line in the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, which was written by poet Mahmoud Darwish and read by Yasser Arafat at the 19<sup>th</sup> Palestinian National Council on November 15, 1988. Though based on rights guaranteed by U.N. resolution 181, an independent Palestinian state has not been established. The Declaration is reprinted in Munazzamat al-Tahrir al-Filastiniyah, *No Voice is Louder Than the Voice of the Uprising* (Nicosia, Cyprus: Ibal Publishing, 1989).

learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place.”<sup>413</sup> Poetry is perhaps the best way to illustrate the colors of exile, as when Barghouti describes his return to Palestine after a 30-year exile:

A distant childhood. The faces of friends and enemies. I am the person coming from the continent of others, from their languages and their borders. The person with spectacles on his eyes and a small bag on his shoulder. And these are the planks of the bridge. These are my steps on them. Here I am walking toward the land of the poem. A visitor? A refugee? A citizen? A guest? I do not know.<sup>414</sup>

Like Said, Barghouti’s prose reflects an alienation developed in the “continents of others,” which he brings as he returns home. Badr offers redemption to the isolation of exile by staking a claim to the right to self-define with or without a nation-state.

In this chapter, I discuss a selection of photographs from several of Al-Ghoussein’s series, primarily *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)*, *Untitled (B Series)*, *Untitled (C Series)* and *(In Beautification)*, in which the artist combines self-portraiture, landscape and performance. The photographs depict the artist coming to terms with his identity, a Palestinian identity that exists without his ever having been there. He produced his first series, *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)*, in response to the mass media’s predominant representation of Palestinians as terrorists. In the series, Al-Ghoussein dons the black-and-white *keffiyeh* and covers his face with it, effectively “playing” the Palestinian terrorist. Yet the strength of the series deals with something altogether different, Al-Ghoussein’s own experience as an exiled Palestinian. While the photographs reveal he does not fit the terrorist stereotype, I argue that they similarly show a precarious sense of belonging to narratives of Palestinian history.<sup>415</sup> This narrative is littered with symbols that have

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<sup>413</sup> Said, *Out of Place*, 295.

<sup>414</sup> Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, 10-11. The bridge Barghouti refers to is called the Allenby Bridge, one of the main, and for some, the only way to get into Palestine. It connects Jordan to the West Bank and crosses over the Jordan River, which has been reduced to a trickle in a place where water is a precious commodity.

<sup>415</sup> For examples of writings by and about Palestine and the Palestinians, see Walid Khalidi, *Before their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876-1948*, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1984);

become icons of the struggle, including stones, demolished houses, the separation wall, and the *keffiyeh*. In Al-Ghoussein's *Self Portrait Series*, the figure can be seen among these symbols, but rather than engage them, as fellow Palestinian artist Emily Jacir suggests, the figure acts as an "interruption in the scene."<sup>416</sup> This interruption highlights the fact that the photograph is staged, which generates what art historian Michael Fried describes as an "acknowledgement of to-be-seenness," which allows Al-Ghoussein to matter-of-factly address the issue at hand in his photographs—the representation of Palestinians and their struggle.<sup>417</sup> Whether that representation is produced by the media to depict Palestinians as terrorists, or whether it is produced via Palestinian narratives of resistance and oppression, the presence of Al-Ghoussein's figure reminds the viewer that they are just that—representations.

Additionally, Al-Ghoussein performs the role with ambiguity, which casts a similar tone over the relationship between the figure and the narratives he evokes. He never quite resolves this relationship. In this way, he borrows from the artist Cindy Sherman and her *Untitled Film*

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Edward W. Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, with photographs by Jean Mohr (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*; Suheir Hammad, *Born Palestinian. Born Black* (Brooklyn, NY: UpSet Press, 2010).

<sup>416</sup> Al-Ghoussein, "Artist Conversation with Emily Jacir," in *Tarek Al-Ghoussein In Absentia*, 27.

<sup>417</sup> Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art As Never Before* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 50. Michael Fried identifies a concern with the issue of beholding among a group of contemporary photographers (he considered Jeff Wall, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Cindy Sherman, Thomas Struth, Thomas Ruff, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Demand and others). His book revisits his 1967 article "Art and Objecthood," in which he contrasted high Modernist art, what he described as "absorptive" art to "theatrical" Minimalist art. The difference lay in the role of the viewer, for, as Fried argued, while Minimalist works were theatrical because they required an engagement with a viewer, Modernist works were self contained either because formal elements in the works were interrelated, or, in the case of mid-18th century French painting, the protagonists were so engrossed in thought or action that the scene painted seemed a realm of its own. In either case, whether a viewer was present or not, successful Modernist art does its work, while Minimalist works do not. Forty years later, Fried returned to the notion of absorption, which he especially saw in Jeff Wall's work. He argued that Wall's are absorptive but also engage what he describes a "to-be-seenness" that is made apparent through Wall's obvious use of the directorial mode. With his back turned to the viewer, Al-Ghoussein's photographs can similarly be described as absorptive; however, it is self-consciously so, and thereby echoes "to-be-seenness." This, according to Fried, is not a return to theatricality, but signals a deliberate reference to the interventions Minimalist art made with regards to the relationship between the work and the viewer. Al-Ghoussein engages this art historical trajectory and links it to a history of representing Arabs and Muslims via Edward Said's Orientalism. In this way, he also references critical art practices that engage the issue of racialized and gendered representations, exemplified in works by Cindy Sherman, James Luna, Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Lorna Simpson, among others. For Fried's "Art and Objecthood," see Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood*, 148-172.

*Stills* (1977-1980), a series in which she performs female stereotypes dominant in films.<sup>418</sup> While her performances are convincing, his evidence a dis-ease with the figure he enacts. I read this in terms of his discomfort with dominant narratives on Palestinian identity. In later series, Al-Ghoussein would drop obvious references to Palestine in favor of abstract, even universal notions such as longing, belonging and transience. Still, it is difficult to get away from Palestine, and in my analysis about *Untitled (C Series)*, I connect the series to a history of Palestinian image making after the great dispossession of 1948. I end the chapter with a discussion of *(In) Beautification*, in which I examine the production of national identity via museum building in the nationally and culturally diverse United Arab Emirates, where Al-Ghoussein has lived since the late 1990s. I read the UAE's recent engagement with the project of museum building and art institutions in relation to the notion that museums are forms of national representation. In a place where most of the population does not "belong," Al-Ghoussein's exilic positioning colors his examination of national identity through the project of museum building. This juxtaposition illustrates the increasing dominance of transnational identities, which the experience of Palestinians well exemplifies in its dispersal across several countries.<sup>419</sup> The UAE also has a stake in transnationality, for it is often home to exiles.

### **Histories: Tarek Al-Ghoussein and Modern Palestine**

Tarek Al-Ghoussein was born in Kuwait in 1962, fourteen years after the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. While that date is a momentous one in Palestinian and Israeli history,

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<sup>418</sup> I discuss Sherman in Chapter 2 in relation to the concept of appropriation.

<sup>419</sup> Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer show how, in the Palestinian context, the argument between nationalism versus transnationalism is complicated because in some cases, diasporic relationships strengthen communities while in other cases emphasize their fractured nature. See Helena Lindholm Schulz (with Juliane Hammer), *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identity and Politics of Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003), 227-229.

the stage upon which that event would take place was set decades before. In response to strong British Zionists petitioning for a state of their own, the British pledged they would “use their best endeavors to...[establish] in Palestine...a national home for the Jewish people” in the 1917 Balfour Declaration, a short letter written by British foreign secretary Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild, the unofficial leader of the British Jewish community, which promised support for the establishment of a state.<sup>420</sup> After the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I in 1918, Palestine came under British rule between 1923-1948 during a period referred to as the British Mandate of Palestine.<sup>421</sup> During the Mandate years, Jewish immigration increased, jumping from 30,000 in 1903 to 367,845, the bulk of which took place between 1920 and 1945. Historian Benny Morris writes that the aim was to gradually build a series of Jewish towns and agricultural settlements that “would ultimately result in a Jewish majority and the establishment of an independent, sovereign Jewish state in all of Palestine.”<sup>422</sup> The well-known Palestinian intellectual and nationalist Khalil al-Sakakini wrote, “Every day the ships bombard us with hundreds of Jewish immigrants. If this immigration continues, Palestine’s future is very black...there is no choice but to rouse ourselves, there is no choice but to shake ourselves, there

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<sup>420</sup> The Balfour Declaration became official when it was included in the British Mandate for Palestine. It is reprinted in full in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds., The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict, 7th ed. (New York, Penguin Books, 2008), 16. Jonathan Schneer writes that the declaration was nearly overridden by negotiations with the French, Arabs, and Ottomans. See Jonathan Schneer, The Balfour Declaration: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict (New York: Random House, 2010).

<sup>421</sup> Upon the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the League of Nations divided the region of the Middle East between the French and the British. See Itzhak Galnoor, The Partition of Palestine: Decision Crossroads in the Zionist Movement (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995). For a historical overview about the Ottoman Empire, see Bernard Lewis, Istanbul and the Civilization of the Ottoman Empire (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).

<sup>422</sup> By 1931, the numbers increased to 175,000, and by 1939, 460,000 Jewish settlers were living in Palestine. Benny Morris, 1948: The First Arab-Israeli War (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 2, 14. Also see Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Jewish Problems in Palestine and Europe, A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, volume 1, 1946, Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1991, 185.

is no choice but to act.”<sup>423</sup> According to historian Rashid Khalidi, “acting” rather than diplomacy seemed the only option, as the British rejected any approach that would give the Palestinian Arab majority governmental control. Reflecting on the attitude towards Palestinians, Khalidi writes that Palestinians were never mentioned by name in the British Mandate and the Balfour Declaration. They were referred to as “non-Jewish communities.”<sup>424</sup> Writing that “national existence was explicitly recognized only for the Zionists in the terms of the Mandate,” Khalidi argues that the British were against the idea of Palestinian self rule.<sup>425</sup>

With their diplomatic efforts towards self-determination consistently rejected, Palestinians were pushed into a corner. While notable Palestinians attempted unsuccessfully to find a place within the British colonial structure, peasants and farmers took matters into their own hands. Bloodshed ensued on a number of occasions, but the most significant took place between 1936-39 in a popular rebellion fought by *fellahin* (peasants) known as the Arab Revolt.<sup>426</sup> The revolt began with a substantial six-month-long general strike and boycott of British and Zionist-controlled parts of the economy in 1936. Though the strike was disorganized and failed to completely shut down the economy, it relayed an important message: Palestinians

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<sup>423</sup> Khalil al-Sakakini, Such Am I, Oh World, (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1990), 165, 174. Also see Akram Musallam, ed. The Days of Khalil Sakakini: 1919-1922, Volume 3 (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies; Ramallah: Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre, 2004) (in Arabic). Sakakini’s legacy lives on in the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah, Palestine. For a short biography of Sakakini, see Salim Tamari, “A Miserable Year in Brooklyn: Khalil Sakakini in America, 1907-1908,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 17 (February 2003), accessed July 31, 2013, <http://www.jerusalemquarterly.org/ViewArticle.aspx?id=154>.

<sup>424</sup> “By contrast, national rights were ascribed to the ‘Jewish people,’ and the League of Nations Mandate made it a solemn responsibility of Great Britain to help the Jews create national institutions.” Rashid Khalidi, The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 35-6. Also see Tom Segev, One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000).

<sup>425</sup> Khalidi, Iron Cage, 41.

<sup>426</sup> Ted Swedenburg, Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2009); Ted Swedenburg, “The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (January 1990): 18-30; Ted Swedenburg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt (1936-1930),” in The Modern Middle East, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Albert Hourani, Philip S. Khoury and Mary C. Wilson (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 467-502; Rashid Khalidi, “The Revolt, 1948, and Afterward,” in Iron Cage, 105-139.

demanded the right to self-determination and independence.<sup>427</sup> At one point in September 1937, the British lost control of much of the countryside and were forced to withdraw from several main cities.<sup>428</sup> The revolt evidenced class divisions in Palestinian society, for while the notable class sought to work with the British to find a solution, *fellahin*, whose rights had long been disregarded by the upper classes, saw no use.<sup>429</sup> Largely led by peasants, the revolt imposed a considerable burden to the British, causing them to question their commitment to Zionism, an ideology that supports the formation of a Jewish majority nation state.<sup>430</sup> The British were able to halt the rebellion in 1939 because of the lack of external support, in addition to a disparate army and political structure on the Palestinian side. Palestinians paid a heavy price with the loss of their best fighters and ammunition, increased political divisions, and a weakened Palestinian economy.<sup>431</sup> Though the *fellahin* failed to prevent the eventual institutionalization of the Zionist project, the popular uprising imprinted the Palestinian resistance in ways that would echo into the future.

One way references the *keffiyeh*, the black-and-white scarf that Al-Ghoussein wore in his *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)*. In early 20th century Palestine, the scarf signified the peasant class, for it was used by countrymen and Bedouin to protect them from the sun and cold. In contrast, middle- and upper-class Palestinian men wore the Ottoman *fez*, thereby connoting their association with the Ottoman colonial powers.<sup>432</sup> During the Arab Revolt, rebels used the scarf to

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<sup>427</sup> For a discussion of the strike, see Segev, *One Palestine*, 368-70.

<sup>428</sup> Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 107.

<sup>429</sup> Tom Segev notes, for example, that the mufti of Jerusalem only unenthusiastically sided with the rebellion. Segev, *One Palestine*, 368. Ted Swedenburg highlights the inter-class antagonisms that played a role in dividing Palestinians during the Arab Revolt. Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, especially 1-37. Also see Shihadah Musa, *The 1936 Revolution in Palestine: A Sociological Examination* (Beirut: Bahith lil Dirasat, 2004) (in Arabic).

<sup>430</sup> The rebellion exacted a great deal of resources from the British, who were simultaneously concerned by the looming crisis leading up to World War II. See Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, 109.

<sup>431</sup> Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, 108.

<sup>432</sup> Conversely, in the early part of the 20th century, Arab nationalists rejected the *fez* to distinguish themselves from Turks, often by wearing the *keffiyeh*. See Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 31.

cover their faces and hide their identity. Anthropologist Ted Swedenburg recounts this history of Palestinian apparel, indicating that while it was associated with lower class, it also came to be associated with Palestinian solidarity because the rebel leadership forced all men to remove their *fez* and replace it with the *keffiyeh*.<sup>433</sup> In this way, when rebels entered towns, they could not be easily identified by the British. Nearly three decades later in the 1960s, the *fidayin* (the exiled Palestinian resistance) revived the use of the *keffiyeh* in a process that Swedenburg indicates “both evoked and produced a memory of a moment when all Palestinians—rural and urban, Christian and Muslim, rich and poor—combined without distinction in collective action.”<sup>434</sup> For those outside of the Middle East, the *keffiyeh* became famous because of Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader who went from chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1969<sup>435</sup> to president of the Palestinian Authority in 1994.<sup>436</sup> For the rest of his life, Arafat would wear the headdress in a demonstration of camaraderie with the *fellahin* and their commitment to national liberation and self-determination during the Arab Revolt. This reference to the popular uprising has become an important part of the Palestinian nationalist narrative through a process of forgetting about the rupture of Palestinian society via class divides.<sup>437</sup> In the late 1980s, young people in the United States put on the *keffiyeh* as a symbol of counter culture and revolution.<sup>438</sup> In

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<sup>433</sup> Swedenburg describes the import of this move, often using humorous anecdotes about the “educated city dwellers” who did not know how to properly wear the scarf, often getting it “tangled inadvertently in a dish of olive oil.” *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>434</sup> Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 35.

<sup>435</sup> The PLO was founded during the First Arab Summit in 1964 as an instrument of Arab nationalism. See James L. Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War* (Cambridge, England, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 198.

<sup>436</sup> For a critique of Arafat’s abiding by the doctrine of armed struggle, see Edward Said, *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 28-31.

<sup>437</sup> Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 35.

<sup>438</sup> In 1988, *Time Magazine* ran an article on the use of the keffiyeh, calling it “perfect 1988 American street style.” The author goes on to say that “it is also what millions of American see on their TV screens practically every night, worn by Palestinians defying Israeli soldiers in the occupied territories.” See Jay Cocks, “Kaffiyehs: Scarves and Minds,” *Time Magazine*, March 21, 1988, 72. See Ted Swedenburg, “Seeing Double: Palestinian/American Histories of the *Kufiya*,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* (Fall 1992): 557-577. Swedenburg has been tracking appearances of the keffiyeh in mainstream popular culture on his blog. See Ted Swedenburg, “Hawgblawg,”

this way, similar to Che Guevara's visage, the *keffiyeh* has become an icon of resistance. It continues to resonate as a signifier of Palestinian identity and to some, terrorism.<sup>439</sup>

With the failure of the revolt and severely weakened resistance, Palestine was ripe for takeover. Several months after a United Nations Special Commission recommended that Palestine be partitioned into two states, David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, declared the independence of Israel, effective midnight on May 14, 1948. In a provocative suggestion of the relationship between art and national identity, the declaration took place in the main hall of the Tel Aviv Art Museum.<sup>440</sup> Alternately called the War of Independence by Zionists and the *Nakba*<sup>441</sup> or "catastrophe" by Palestinians, the establishment of Israel led to the expulsion of over 700,000 Palestinians, 60% of the population, in what historian Ilan Pappé refers to as the "ethnic cleansing of Palestine."<sup>442</sup> While some were internally displaced, a large number were pushed to the bordering countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Egypt.<sup>443</sup> Those who had the means went to Europe, the Americas or the Arabian Gulf countries, where the recent

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accessed February 14, 2011, <http://swedenburg.blogspot.com/>. For a discussion of a talk given by Dr. Swedenburg at the Palestine Center in Washington, D.C., on 8 April 2010, see Delinda C. Hanley, "Keffiyeh: From Resistance Symbol to Retail Item?," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 29, no. 5 (July 2010): 63.

<sup>439</sup> The Food Network star Rachel Ray wore a *keffiyeh* inspired scarf in a 2008 Dunkin' Donuts commercial, causing an uproar. The conservative blog Little Green Footballs said the ads "casually promote the symbol of Palestinian terrorism and the intifada, the keffiyeh, via Rachel Ray." See Stephanie Clifford, "For Dunkin,' a Tempest in an Iced-Coffee Cup," *New York Times*, May 30, 2008, C8.

<sup>440</sup> Leslie Stein, *The Making of Modern Israel: 1948-1967* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), 16.

<sup>441</sup> The term "Al Nakba" was immediately appropriated into the title of a book by Qustantin Zurayq, a leading proponent of Arabism starting in the 1930s. See Qustantin Zurayq, *Ma'na al-Nakba (The Meaning of the Disaster)*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm lil-Malayin, 1948).

<sup>442</sup> Whereas in many villages armed Israeli soldiers surrounded the villages from three sides to force their departure, in several cases, massacres ensued (Pappé focuses on the village of Tantura). See Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 135-140.

<sup>443</sup> For a discussion of the various Palestinians diasporas divided by region see Helena Lindholm Schulz (with Juliane Hammer), "Palestinians in the World," in *The Palestinian Diaspora*, 45-85. Schulz and Hammer write that the degree to which diaspora Palestinians feel attachment to Palestine varies depending on geographic location, the generation to which they belong, economic realities, and government policy. For a discussion of this issue in the context of Australia, see Victoria Mason, "Children of the 'Idea of Palestine': Negotiating Identity, Belonging and Home in the Palestinian Diaspora," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (August 2007): 271-285.

discovery of oil made such destinations lucrative.<sup>444</sup> Many of these Palestinians would send remittances to their families, providing the main source of income and going so far as to pay for the education of their siblings.<sup>445</sup> For those in refugee camps, life was bleak, and many today remain without citizenship. Refugees in Lebanon today, for example, are not only denied citizenship, but their rights to employment are also severely limited. Additionally, official policy has made post-secondary education for Palestinians difficult.<sup>446</sup> Believing return was (is) imminent, Palestinian refugees often held (hold) onto the land deeds and keys to the homes in Palestine, though their homes, assets and belongings have long been lost.<sup>447</sup> Whether economically secure or wallowing in the camps, the Palestinian right to return has not materialized despite its guarantee in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United Nations General Assembly adopted in 1948 and reaffirmed each year since.<sup>448</sup>

Al-Ghoussein's parents left Palestine and headed for Syria just before the war in 1948.

His father is from Ramla and his mother from Jerusalem. Ramla is a town in central Israel that

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<sup>444</sup> The Gulf countries include Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Oil was first discovered in Bahrain in 1932, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait in 1938, in the United Arab Emirates in 1958 and Oman in 1963. The most significant oil reserves in the world are in Saudi Arabia. See Gregory F. Gause, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994); Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates* (Reading, U.K.: Garnet Publishing Ltd., 1989).

<sup>445</sup> The issue of remittances figured in the PLO's communiqués, which called on Palestinians to support those left in refugee camps. See Joseph Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism" *Middle East Journal* 49, no. 3 (1995): 378.

<sup>446</sup> See Simon Haddad, *The Palestinian Impasse in Lebanon: The Politics of Refugee Integration* (Brighton/Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2003), 42. Also see Julie Peteet, "Identity Crisis: Palestinians in Post-War Lebanon," *Worldwide Refugee Information* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees), 1999; Rosemary Sayigh, "Dis/Solving the Refugee Problem," *Middle East Report* 28, no. 207 (Summer 1998): 19-23; Shulz and Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora*, 53-62.

<sup>447</sup> Filmmaker Annemarie Jacir referenced this problem in her film *Salt of the Sea*. *Salt of the Sea (Milh Hadha al-Bahr)*, directed by Annemarie Jacir (New York: Kino Lorber Inc., 2010), DVD. On the issue of Palestinian refugees' property left in Israel in 1948, see Michael R. Fischbach, *The Peace Process and Palestinian Refugee Claims: Addressing Claims for Property Compensation and Restitution* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 2006).

<sup>448</sup> United Nations, "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," accessed August 5, 2013, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>. Also see Loukis G. Loucaides, "The Right of Return" in *The European Convention on Human Rights* (Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007), 245-265; Susan M. Akram, et al., *International Law and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Rights-Based Approach to Middle East Peace* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011).

was taken in 1948 because of its strategic geographic location. According to Benny Morris, the expulsion of Palestinians from Ramla and Lydda “accounted for a full one-tenth of the Arab exodus from Palestine; it was the largest operation of its kind in the first Israeli-Arab war.”<sup>449</sup> The Al-Ghoussein family first went briefly to Syria and then headed to Kuwait, where Al-Ghoussein was born in 1962.<sup>450</sup> Al-Ghoussein’s father was an ambassador to the U.S. in Kuwait in the 1960s and played an important role in Kuwait’s entry into the United Nations.<sup>451</sup> His family was therefore awarded with the rare privilege of naturalized Kuwaiti citizenship.<sup>452</sup> In contrast to those Palestinians who ended up in refugee camps, the Al-Ghoussein family was economically well off and thus spared the misery of destitution so many continue to face. When he was three months old, Al-Ghoussein’s family moved from Kuwait to New York and then Washington, D.C.; to Morocco at the age of eight; and then to Japan for the next seven years.

Al-Ghoussein was only five years old and living in the United States when the War of 1967 broke out between Egypt, Syria, and Israel. Alternately referred to as the Six Day War, it was a significant blow to Palestinians, for Israel captured the West Bank, the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, effectively tripling Israel’s geographic reach in only six days.<sup>453</sup> Syria and Egypt tried unsuccessfully to take back their land militarily in 1973.<sup>454</sup> Sinai was eventually returned to Egypt through bilateral agreements reached during the 1978

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<sup>449</sup> Benny Morris, “Operation Dani and the Palestinian Exodus from Lydda and Ramle in 1948,” *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 82-109.

<sup>450</sup> Al-Ghoussein’s biography comes from an interview with the author in May 2008 (Sharjah, UAE). See Tarek Al-Ghoussein, interview with Kathy Zarur, Sharjah, UAE, May 2008, and Tarek Al-Ghoussein, private email message to Kathy Zarur, November 1, 2011.

<sup>451</sup> S.T., “Art, diplomatically deployed.”

<sup>452</sup> For a discussion of citizenship in Kuwait, see Anh Nga Longva, “Citizenship in the Gulf States,” in *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East: Approaches and Applications*, eds. Nils August Butenschøn, Uri Davis, Manuel Sarkis Hassassian (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 179-201. Also Anh Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion and Society in Kuwait* (Boulder, CO and London, Westview Press, 1997).

<sup>453</sup> Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War and the Year that Transformed the Middle East*, trans. Jessica Cohen (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005); Benny Morris, “The Six Day War,” in *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001*, with a new final chapter (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 302-346.

<sup>454</sup> For readings on this war see Don Peretz, “The 1973 October War,” in *The Arab-Israeli Dispute* (New York: Facts On File, 1996), 71-6; Ahron Bregman, *Israel’s Wars: A History Since 1947* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 136-66.

Camp David Accords.<sup>455</sup> Jordan and Egypt withdrew their claim to the West Bank and Gaza, respectively, while Israel still occupies the Golan Heights. The war produced another significant wave of refugees, estimated at 400,000 people.<sup>456</sup> The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) militarily occupied the areas, subjecting Palestinians to oppression that often involved mass detentions and extrajudicial killings.<sup>457</sup> While Israeli settlements were being built through the areas, Palestinian homes were demolished, and land was expropriated.<sup>458</sup> Access to water was severely limited, as water from the Jordan River was diverted for the sole use of Israelis. Unemployment was an increasing problem and Palestinians who worked in Israel were paid significantly less than Israelis.<sup>459</sup> Unlimited curfews were imposed; property was destroyed and/or confiscated; thousands of Palestinians were detained and subjected to torture in prison;<sup>460</sup> and schools and universities were forced to suspend instruction. Israel severely restricted political and cultural expression—newspapers and magazines were censored, books were banned, as was the Palestinian flag and its colors.<sup>461</sup> Even mention of “Palestine” could cause problems.<sup>462</sup>

Al-Ghoussein was spared such experiences, living in the United States, Morocco, and Japan during these years. Nine years after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, Al-Ghoussein returned to the Middle East to attend high school at the American School in his country of birth, Kuwait. While there with his mother and siblings, his father was posted in Yemen. Those years coincided

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<sup>455</sup> Jimmy Carter, Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 37-54; Fouad Ajami, “The Arab Road,” *Foreign Policy* 47 (Summer 1982): 3-25; Fouad Ajami, “The Arab Road,” *Foreign Policy* 47 (Summer 1982): 3-25.

<sup>456</sup> Ingrid Jaradat Gassner, 2008-2009 Survey of Palestinian Refugees and IDPs (Bethlehem, Palestine: BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights, 2010), 2.

<sup>457</sup> Walid Khalidi, Before Their Diaspora, 15-16.

<sup>458</sup> Gelvin, The Israel-Palestine Conflict, 215.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>460</sup> Joe Sacco’s graphic novel is especially powerful in retelling stories he collected while in Palestine. See Joe Sacco, Palestine (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books), 2001.

<sup>461</sup> Nada M. Shabbout, Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 50. Also see Hammer, Palestinians Born in Exile, 36.

<sup>462</sup> Edward W. Said, “Intifada and Independence,” in Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Oppression, ed. Zachary Lockman (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1989), 6-7.

with the Iran Hostage Crisis (1979-1981), during which 52 Americans were kidnapped and held for 444 days when a group of students supporting the Iranian Revolution took control of the American Embassy in Tehran.<sup>463</sup> The event impacted his understanding of racial and cultural difference. An “us versus them” mentality colored the social climate as his friends with American citizenship were made to leave the Middle East because of the political situation. Al-Ghoussein describes the period as the first time he understood the ways in which “identity is superimposed,” indicating that the distinctions between Arabs and others did not fit his sense of self.<sup>464</sup> Al-Ghoussein went back to the U.S. after he graduated from high school in 1980, attending Whittier College in southern California. This would be his first serious turn to academics, specifically literature.<sup>465</sup> He continued his undergraduate studies at New York University, where he shifted to photography and biology, graduating in 1985. Though he did well in biology, he decided to enroll in an MFA program to study photography.

With an academic background informed by science, Al-Ghoussein found a welcome home in the well-regarded photography department at the University of New Mexico, where professors placed great emphasis on formalism. There he studied with photographers Thomas Barrow and Patrick Nagatani. Although staging would become central to his later work, at UNM, Al-Ghoussein worked in the style of documentary photography. He was particularly interested in the work of Lee Friedlander and Robert Frank, photographers who played the line between the assumed objectivity of straight or documentary photography and subjectivity of art

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<sup>463</sup> See David Farber, Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America’s First Encounter with Radical Islam (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); David Houghton, US Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>464</sup> Al-Ghoussein, “Artist Conversation with Emily Jacir,” in Tarek Al-Ghoussein In Absentia, 26.

<sup>465</sup> Al-Ghoussein is an avid reader of works by Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Blake, and Franz Kafka. *Ibid.*, 25.

photography.<sup>466</sup> Frank's book *The Americans* (1958) represented the supposed utopian U.S. as a society torn by race and class.<sup>467</sup> The Swiss photographer traveled around the United States, depicting the country fraught with troubled race relations and consumed by blind nationalism.<sup>468</sup> *Parade—Hoboken, New Jersey* (1955) (Figure 4.1) shows two women, each standing at a window, presumably watching a parade go past. Their faces are obscured—one by a partially drawn white shade, and the other by a large fluttering American flag. These women are anonymous. By photographing a seemingly gritty brick building with poorly painted window frames whose residents seem estranged, Frank depicts a clumsy nationalism, a nationalism that is also blind, as illustrated by the flag that blocks the woman's view. As Jonathan Day describes the photograph, it is “a look through a flag at the faces hidden behind it, and the extent to which these faces are stained by its red, white and blue.”<sup>469</sup> Frank's photos capture the American psyche of the decade with shots that point to racial tension, car culture or patriotism.<sup>470</sup>

Upon graduating in 1989, Al-Ghoussein turned to photo journalism and traveled to

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<sup>466</sup> This binary refers to the history of the medium, which when invented (in 1839 by Louis Daguerre, who built on Nicéphore Niépce's earlier experiments), was seen as a tool for copying, what Charles Baudelaire called the “handmaid of the arts and sciences” in 1895. In his mind and in the minds of others, photography was a mechanical process that excluded the artist's touch and sensibility; it was not unique. Early photographers would challenge this notion, but Alfred Stieglitz was most famous for this work. He promoted photography as art by reproducing images in the journal *Camera Work* (1903-1917) and exhibiting them in 291 Gallery (1905-1917, New York). A collection of historical essays that shaped the discourse on photography can be found in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., Classic Essays on Photography (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980). For Baudelaire quote, see Charles Baudelaire, “The Modern Public and Photography,” in Trachtenberg, ed., Classic Essays on Photography, 83-89.

<sup>467</sup> Robert Frank, The Americans, 4th ed., introduction by Jack Kerouac (New York: SCALO Publishers in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2000).

<sup>468</sup> Frank noted that he “had a feeling of compassion for the people on the street.” See Dennis Wheeler, “Robert Frank Interviewed,” *Criteria* 3, no. 2 (June 1977): np.

<sup>469</sup> Jonathan Day, Robert Frank's The Americans: The Art of Documentary Photography (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 73. Another theme Al-Ghoussein has in common with Frank work that can be travel, though a wandering-by-foot replaces the cars that Frank used to cross and document the United States. A brief mention of the theme of travel in Al-Ghoussein's work appears in a review of Sharjah Biennial 6, where the reviewer describes the figure as “trekking alone through local landscapes...as if on a journey of discovery.” See Grady Turner, “Fast Forward on the Persian Gulf,” *Art in America* 91, no. 11 (November 2003): 86-91, quote on 91. For Frank's legacy regarding the issue of travel, see Philip Gefter, “Travels with Walker, Robert, and Andy: On Stephen Shore,” in Photography After Frank (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2009), 17-19.

<sup>470</sup> George Cotkin, “The Photographer in Beat-Hipster Idiom: Robert Frank's *The Americans*,” *American Studies* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 19-33.

Jordan to photograph Palestinian refugees. Al-Ghoussein's refugee camp photographs are strong and depict what the American poet Jack Kerouac penned "intermediary mysteries" to describe Frank's work.<sup>471</sup> These are moments that otherwise go by unnoticed but when frozen in a photograph are replete with intrigue. Al-Ghoussein approached the project of photographing the Jebel Hussein Refugee Camp in ways that echo Frank's, whose influence is especially evident in Al-Ghoussein's framing, tendency to shoot from below, and focus on unguarded facial expressions. *Jebel Hussein Refugee Camp No. 8, Jordan* (1993) (Figure 4.2) is a black-and-white photograph that depicts a cramped space where several people meet. While the photo perimeter is lined with fragments of three people, one woman dominates the scene in the center. The middle-aged woman sits between a small folding table placed at her feet and a ladder behind her. With one hand over her chest and the other in her lap, the look on her face is weary. The room is disheveled—the tiles from which a simple faucet projects are crumbling at the edges, the cracked concrete wall is covered in patches, a crumpled mass of plastic and paper is on the floor on the left. In this unkempt place, four people have gathered for a social visit. In typical Palestinian fashion, a tray of drinks has been set in front of the woman on a fold-up stool. Her purse sits on the floor next to her. To her left, we see the hand and knee of a man sitting against the wall. Another man stands on the right side of the frame. With his extended hand, the only part of his body in the photo, he gestures to another, whose nose and mouth peek from the bottom left corner of the photograph. His hand emerges from the bottom frame to offer a liquid-filled plastic bottle. Al-Ghoussein's decision to crop out all but fragments of three of four people in the scene increases the cramped feeling of the space. The two hands that reach toward each other on the bottom of the frame create a diagonal that echoes the ladder in a process that divides the picture

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<sup>471</sup> Jack Kerouac, "Introduction," in Frank, *The Americans*, np.

plane into three slices. This works to reduce the breathing space even further. The anonymous figures and jumbled space in Al-Ghoussein's photograph reflect the poverty and loss typical in the lives of so many refugees.

Shot in straight documentary style, Al-Ghoussein's Jebel Hussein Camp photographs capitalize on framing and composition to show the struggles that generations of landless and expelled Palestinians face while striving to capture the "decisive moment," the perfect alignment of timing and forms.<sup>472</sup> Yet despite the strength of the work, Al-Ghoussein was not happy. So unhappy, in fact, that in an extreme and redolent act, he burned most of the negatives, claiming that the economic poverty evidenced in the photographs eclipsed what he was really after: the psychological aspects of being a refugee.<sup>473</sup> Discussing the decision to purge the photographs, Al-Ghoussein explained that he "was at a remove from the images—they didn't speak of my experience."<sup>474</sup> Since he came from an economically stable family, his experience of the loss of Palestine is something very different from the experience of those who lack economic mobility. His rather loaded decision to purge the photographs with fire indicates his personal investment in a photographic practice as one that should reflect his experience. It would be over a decade before he would pick up a camera again, leaving behind documentary photography and opting

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<sup>472</sup> Art critic Kaelen Wilson-Goldie used the term "decisive moment" to describe Al-Ghoussein's early work in Wilson-Goldie, "Beautiful Anguish." Henri Cartier-Bresson coined the term (in its original French "images à la sauvette") and defined it: "to me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression." Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Mind's Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers* (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1999), 42.

<sup>473</sup> Coincidentally, Robert Frank drove a nail through a stack of his photographs from *The Americans*, and wrote across them, "The end of photography." See W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 277. Al-Ghoussein's story is mentioned in Anonymous, "Tarek Al-Ghoussein: Identities...Unidentified," *bazaar: freedom to express*, 2011, accessed July 22, 2013, [http://www.bazaar-magazine.com/baz/bazaar/index.php?show=eIndex&show\\_filter=view&action=article&art\\_id=ART00000000962](http://www.bazaar-magazine.com/baz/bazaar/index.php?show=eIndex&show_filter=view&action=article&art_id=ART00000000962); Antonia Carver, "Tarek Al-Ghoussein," in *Sharjah International Biennial 6*, Department of Culture and Information, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 2003, 270; Seth Thompson, "Palestinian Identity: The Work of Tarek Al-Ghoussein," *Afterimage* 34 no. 5 (March/April 2007): 10-12.

<sup>474</sup> Carver, "Tarek Al-Ghoussein," 270.

instead for the directorial mode, with which he treated the world as what photography critic A.D. Coleman described as “raw material, to be itself manipulated as much as desired prior to the exposure of the negative.”<sup>475</sup> Incorporating the practice of staging gave Al-Ghoussein a freedom that documentary photography could not provide. It allowed him to produce series of photographic tableaux that serve as an extended examination of his exilic identity.

During the period of his studies at the University of New Mexico, life in Palestine was tumultuous. Realizing that no one could help, including the Arab governments and PLO with which their hopes lay for decades,<sup>476</sup> the most-oppressed echelon of Palestinian society took matters in their own hands for the second time since the 1936-39 rebellion. The first *Intifada* (*intifada* means “shaking off”) began in 1987 in refugee camps of Gaza. The world would witness another *Intifada* in 2000, but the first is remembered as an extraordinary example of Palestinian solidarity and non-violent resistance.<sup>477</sup> Palestinians organized the uprising through a series of democratic popular committees often led by people whose identities were secret.<sup>478</sup> Women in both rural and urban areas were an important part of the *Intifada*.<sup>479</sup> In addition,

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<sup>475</sup> At a moment when critics denigrated photographic practices that did not integrate realism, Coleman argued that the simple acts of framing and selecting a point of view were creative decisions that all photographers engaged. He also highlighted the use of staging through the history of the medium. He wrote: “it is the presumption of moral righteousness which has accrued to purism, above and beyond its obvious legitimacy as a creative choice.” See A.D. Coleman, “Directorial Mode,” in *Light Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 252.

<sup>476</sup> Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 214.

<sup>477</sup> For a discussion of the use of nonviolent resistance during the first *Intifada*, see Mary Elizabeth King, *A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance* (New York: Nation Books, 2007). General texts on the first *Intifada* include Jamal R. Nassar and Roger Heacock, *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990); Zachary Lockman and Joel Beinin, eds., *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1989); Phil Marshall, *Intifada: Zionism, Imperialism and Palestinian Resistance* (London: Bookmarks, 1989); Staughton Lynd, Sam Bahour and Alice Lynd, *Homeland: Oral Histories of Palestine and Palestinians* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1994).

<sup>478</sup> Eric Alterman, Daoud Kuttab, Ibrahim Dakkak and Rita Giacaman, “Report from the Occupied Territories: Palestinians Speak,” *World Policy Journal* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 520.

<sup>479</sup> For a discussion of the roles women played during the first *Intifada*, see Souad Dajani, “Between National and Social Liberation,” in *Women and the Israeli Occupation*, ed. Tamar Mayer (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 33-61; Simona Sharoni, *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Politics of Women’s Resistance* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 56-89; Ebba Augustin, ed., *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1993), especially 111-194; Rita Giacaman and Penny Johnson, “Palestinian Women: Building Barricades and Breaking Barriers,” in Lockman and Beinin, eds., *Intifada*,

children and youth played a significant role, paying a bloody price.<sup>480</sup> Women used their bodies as shields, sometimes hiding fighters under their long and loose fitting *thob* (the traditional Palestinian woman's dress).<sup>481</sup> People supported each other, as there were few resources with which to fight against the occupier. They used Molotov cocktails and blocked roads with burning tires, but the image of the stone-wielding Palestinian youngster stands out as the quintessential symbol of Palestinian resistance (Figure 4.3).

Banking on the success of the *Intifada*, the PLO produced the Declaration of Independence in 1988, eventually leading to the PLO's recognition of the state of Israel. The Palestinian recognition of Israel was the first step away from the ideology of liberation and towards that of statehood, which has yet to come to fruition. Despite this, expressions of Palestinian national identity through literature and art (among other things) signal its existence.<sup>482</sup> There is a significant distinction between the two institutions: "nation-state" refers to a sovereign people, an internationally recognized government and established borders and a military.<sup>483</sup> National identity is best understood via Benedict Anderson, who described it as an "imagined political community" forged through common identification despite the dispersal of a community.<sup>484</sup> The first *Intifada* ended after nine years in 1996.<sup>485</sup> Two years later, Al-Ghoussein

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155-170; Islah Jad, "From Salons to the Popular Committees: Palestinian Women, 1919-1989," in Nassar and Heacock, *Intifada*, 125-142.

<sup>480</sup> Eyad El Sarraj and Samir Qouta, "The Palestinian Experience," in *Disasters and Mental Health*, Juan José López-Ibor Aliño, et al. (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley, 2005), 229-238; James Ron, "Savage Restraint: Israel, Palestine and the Dialectics of Legal Repression," *Social Problems* 47, no. 4 (November 2000): 445-72; Al-Haq, *Punishing a Nation: Human Rights Violations during the Palestinian Uprising, December 1987-1988* (Ramallah: Al-Haq, 1989).

<sup>481</sup> Ghneim Zarour, interviewed by Kathy Zarur, personal interview, Ramallah, Palestine, September 10, 2008.

<sup>482</sup> The notion of the existence of Palestine stems from an infamous 1969 statement by Golda Meir, the fourth Prime Minister of Israel: "There were no such thing as Palestinians...They do not exist." See, "Golda Meir Scorns Soviets: Israeli Premier Explains Stand on Big-4 Talks, Security Mrs. Meir Bars Any 'Deal' for Israel's Security," *The Washington Post*, 16 June 1969: A1.

<sup>483</sup> See E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>484</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

moved to the United Arab Emirates to teach at the American University of Sharjah, where he remained until 2013, when he was hired by New York University's Abu Dhabi campus as an Arts Professor of Visual Arts.

While the photographs Al-Ghoussein produced during and soon after his stint at UNM are more reminiscent of Lee Friedlander or Robert Frank's, Patrick Nagatani's impact—from his choice of subject matter to the practice of staging to his appearance in some photographs—is clear.<sup>486</sup> Nagatani's practice during Al-Ghoussein's time at UNM was heavily influenced by his work in the 1970s, when he built special-effects models for science-fiction Hollywood films. Staging therefore became a dominant aspect of his photography, first working with painter Andrée Tracey from 1983-1989. The duo were invited by Polaroid Corporation to use one of five existing 200-lb. 20x24 inch cameras.<sup>487</sup> Bringing with them props, photo mock ups and monofilament wire, they created lavishly hued tableaus with "moralizing incentive" about nuclear bombs.<sup>488</sup> The subject was of personal significance to Nagatani. He was born in Chicago in 1945, only two weeks after the United States dropped an atomic bomb over the city of Hiroshima. Nagatani's family was living outside of Hiroshima and suffered the devastation of

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<sup>485</sup> The current situation in Palestine is bleak. While there was hope with the Oslo Accords (1993) and the promise of a Palestinian state, it never materialized. The Palestinian Authority was created and granted limited self-rule over the West Bank in partnership with the Israeli government. Aside from the issue of statehood, others have remained unresolved, including the status of Jerusalem, the settlements, and the borders between Israel and Palestine. Today there is growing support for the one-state solution, though it is not one backed by Israel, the U.S., or the P.A., for that matter. On the Oslo Accords see Edward Said, The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After, New York: Pantheon Books, 2000. For the one-state solution see Ali Abunimah, One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Virginia Tilley, The One-State solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

<sup>486</sup> Remarkable in this regard are Nagatani's 1993-95 series of landscape photographs of Japanese internment camps from World War II, though Al-Ghoussein was not aware of the photographs until 2012. Nagatani had a personal stake in the subject, as his parents were held at Manzanar in California and Jerome, Arkansas. See Jasmine Alinder, "Virtual Pilgrimage: The Contemporary Incarceration Photography of Patrick Nagatani and Masumi Hayashi," in Moving Images: Photography and the Japanese American Incarceration (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 126-153.

<sup>487</sup> Joel Weishaus, "Atomic Polaroids: Patrick Nagatani & Andrée Tracey," 1989, accessed June 9, 2013, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/weishaus/Writing/nagatani.htm>.

<sup>488</sup> Eugenia Parry Janis, "A Hot Iron Ball He Can Neither Swallow Nor Spit Out: Patrick Nagatani, Nuclear Fear, and the Uses of Enchantment," in Nuclear Enchantment, photographs by Patrick Nagatani (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 1-48.

that attack.<sup>489</sup> In *Alamogordo Blues* (1986) (Figure 4.4), Tracey and Nagatani constructed a viewing platform upon which sit a small crowd of Japanese men holding their cameras at the ready.<sup>490</sup> The red sky over the desert landscape and their glowing red goggles are evidence of the mushroom cloud they have captured with their Polaroid cameras. The cloud appears on five photographs being blown away by the force of the explosion. The men's ties follow suit, flapping over their right shoulders. The shot is based on a U.S. Department of Defense photograph called *Observers, Operation Greenhouse* (1951) (Figure 4.5), which depicts a group of seated men viewing a nuclear bomb test in Nevada. *Alamogordo Blues* uses dark humor to comment on the ignorance early scientists displayed in their willingness to expose themselves and the surrounding population to unknown amounts of radiation.<sup>491</sup> And while the issue of nuclear arms was personally significant for Nagatani, his use of staging also engaged the role of photography in the "public fascination with grand 'spectacles,' photographs of calamity or natural disaster."<sup>492</sup> By integrating multiple instances of viewing and representing—the appropriation of an earlier photo depicting the audience of a nuclear bomb test, the Japanese-tourist-with-camera stereotype, the image of the mushroom cloud on the Polaroids (Figure 4.6), and the process by which Nagatani and Tracey produced the scene—the photograph is a

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<sup>489</sup> According to Weishaus, Nagatani's aunt suffered severe burns. See Weishaus, "Atomic Polaroids: Patrick Nagatani & Andrée Tracey."

<sup>490</sup> The figures in *Alamogordo Blues* were photographed one by one seated on an Adirondack chair. The large format black-and-white photograph were printed, mounted onto foam core, cut out, and hand painted by Tracey. Nagatani appears in the photograph "somewhere in the back of the group." See Patrick Nagatani, "Patrick Nagatani on Alamogordo Blues," in "Nagatani-Tracey Collaboration," accessed June 11, 2013, <http://www.patricknagatani.com/>.

<sup>491</sup> While scientists may not have been aware of the specific impact of nuclear explosions, according to Howard Ball, in the late 1980s, the U.S. government continued to downplay its effects after a Nevada community downwind of a testing site sued the government. See Howard Ball, *Justice Downwind: America's Atomic Testing Program in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988).

<sup>492</sup> Mark Johnstone, "Patrick Nagatani and Andrée Tracey: Circumstances Beyond Our Control," in *Patrick Nagatani / Andrée Tracey: Polaroid 20 x 24 Photographs 1983-1986* (Tokyo, Japan; Santa Monica, CA: Gallery Min, 1987), 1.

meditation on “the process by which viewers may come to know.”<sup>493</sup> Therefore, while the subject is undoubtedly the impact of nuclear proliferation, it is also about the role media plays in the dissemination of information.

While at UNM, Al-Ghoussein was admittedly uninterested in his professor’s work because of the latter’s extreme use of staging.<sup>494</sup> The student’s commitment to the practice of straight photography is evidenced by the first lines of his MFA thesis:

For the most part, I go out to photograph without a pre-conceived idea of a certain type of picture. When I think too much, I struggle to quiet those thoughts as I am walking and this enables me to be more aware of my surroundings. Very rarely have I taken an interesting picture that was suited to some pre-conceived or conscious idea.<sup>495</sup>

For the young Al-Ghoussein, straight photography involved an intuitive process, and the term “intuition” repeats often in his thesis.<sup>496</sup> The thirteen-page document shows a photographer eager to find a unique photographic vision free from “influence,” but it also indicates the direction to which he would eventually head upon his decision to abandon the documentary mode. For example, he wrote a paragraph about why he obscures faces in his photographs, indicating his interest not in individual lives, but “in the routine or rituals the people engage as a culture rather than as individuals.”<sup>497</sup> He preferred to produce “ambiguous or open ended” rather than narrative photographs (all but one of Al-Ghoussein’s current series are without narrative sequence).<sup>498</sup> But most significant is the last paragraph of his essay, in which Al-Ghoussein indicates that one of his future goals is to “work in a more directorial way.”<sup>499</sup> The statement is the only mention of the practice that would later become his *modus operandi*, and he gives no further explanation of

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<sup>493</sup> Bryan C. Taylor, “Nuclear Pictures and Metapictures,” *American Literary History* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 591-3.

<sup>494</sup> Tarek Al-Ghoussein, email communication with the author, June 11, 2013.

<sup>495</sup> Tarek Talat Al-Ghoussein, “Words on Recent Photographs” (master’s Thesis, University of New Mexico, 1990), 1.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 6, 11.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

how it could fit into his photographic practice. Though Al-Ghoussein does not offer more than this analogous statement, it points to his budding interest in Nagatani's practice of staging.

The directorial mode has offered Al-Ghoussein a working strategy for engaging with the question of exilic Palestinian identity. Since he adopted it in 2002, he has produced nine series of photographs, in most of which he figures. While his *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)* remain his most well known, many of his series have been collected and exhibited in rather reputable international contexts. His photographs now comprise collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), the Solomon R. Guggenheim (New York), Mori Art Museum (Tokyo), Sharjah Art Foundation (Sharjah), Mathaf Museum (Qatar), the Barjeel Art Foundation (Sharjah), and the Museum of Fine Art (Houston, TX). Highlights of exhibitions include the 53rd Venice Biennial (Kuwait Pavilion, 2013), a retrospective exhibition at the Sharjah Art Museum (2010), and group exhibitions "Arab Express: The Latest Art from the Arab World" (Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2012), Singapore Biennial (2008), "Scenes of the South," (Carré d'Art, Nimes, France, 2008), and "Nazar: Photographs from the Arab World" (Aperture Gallery, NY and Langhans Gallery, Prague, 2005). He is represented by The Third Line in Dubai and Taymour Grahne Gallery in New York.

## **Symbols of Palestine**

### *Resistance from exile*

Between 2002-2003, Tarek Al-Ghoussein produced the *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)*, first exhibiting them in 2003 at the 6th Sharjah Biennial. In the installation, Al-Ghoussein used light boxes to back light eight 2x3 meter (6.5x9.8 feet) large photographs (Figure 4.7).

Borrowing from the language of advertising, Al-Ghoussein stated that using the light box

“was...a play on being in the light.” He continues: “I was trying to play with metaphors, one could say, or symbols within the medium.”<sup>500</sup> The strategy refers to the language of the mass media to consider the ways in which the Palestine-Israel conflict represented. Indeed, Al-Ghoussein’s statement on the series describes it as an examination of media portrayals of Palestinians:

the project started as a result of my growing frustration with the way in which the Palestinians and other Arabs were being represented and, in some cases, misrepresented in Western media. In addition, I was drawn to the apparent similarities between the Myth of Sisyphus and what can be characterized as the growing “myth” generated through the Western media, specifically the myth that all Palestinians are terrorists and that the Palestinian intifada, like Sisyphus, seems condemned to an endless cyclic struggle. Transcending media representations has been an ongoing “uphill battle” for Palestinians and all Arabs.<sup>501</sup>

Sisyphus is a figure in Greek mythology who was doomed to an eternal cycle in which he pushed a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll down. By appropriating this myth, Al-Ghoussein indicates that his concern extends beyond representation, for as political scientist Gadi Wolfsfeld and others have written about the Palestinian context, there is a relationship between media representations and U.S. policy.<sup>502</sup>

The series depicts Al-Ghoussein wandering endlessly through landscapes filled with symbols of the Palestinian struggle. He dons the most famous of them, the black-and-white *keffiyeh*, which by that time had long been associated with the Palestinian so-called terrorist in

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<sup>500</sup> Thompson, “Palestinian Identity,” 11. In this way, Al-Ghoussein references the use of light boxes by Jeff Wall, who was interested in the notion of both formal and conceptual “illumination” in advertising. Jeff Wall and John Roberts, “Post-60s Photography and its Modernist Context: A Conversation Between Jeff Wall and John Roberts,” *Oxford Art Journal* 30, no. 1 (March 2007): 165. Also see Fried, *Why Photographs Matter*, 2008.

<sup>501</sup> Darat al Funun, “Walls and Checkpoints: Tarek Al-Ghoussein Untitled and Self Portrait Series,” accessed June 26, 2013, <http://www.daratafunun.org/main/activit/curentl/febo6/tarek/tarek06.html>.

<sup>502</sup> Gadi Wolfsfeld, *The Media and Political Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 208-209; Edward Said, “Intifada and Independence,” in Zachary Lockman, ed., *Intifada*, especially 11; R.S. Zaharna, “The Palestinian Leadership and the American Media: Changing Images, Conflicting Results,” in *The U.S. Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception*, ed., Yahya R. Kamalipour (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 37-49; AnneMarie A. Daniel, “U.S. Media Coverage of the *Intifada* and American Public Opinion,” in Kamalipour, ed., *The U.S. Media and the Middle East*, 62-72; Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

the Western media.<sup>503</sup> It may even have been considered old news, for after its stint as a fashionable accessory in the late 1980s, young people eager to associate themselves with revolution and counter culture were wearing it less and less.<sup>504</sup> Still, two later anecdotes point to the *keffiyeh*'s lasting resonance. In one, Al-Ghoussein was detained for twenty-two hours by the Jordanian police after he was witnessed producing one of his *keffiyeh* photographs on the banks of the Dead Sea, looking across to his unreachable Palestine (Figure 1.5).<sup>505</sup> A similar story concerns the head of an Amsterdam television station and *Untitled 5 (Self Portrait Series)* (2003) (Figure 4.8), which depicts Al-Ghoussein wrapped with the *keffiyeh* walking alongside a parked jet. The photograph was used to advertise the 2004 Noorderlicht International Photography Exhibition, but when the station head saw it in the newspaper *de Volkskrant*, he thought a hijacking had taken place.<sup>506</sup>

The series is his best known and most controversial. At a gallery show in Berlin, a visitor threw a rock at one of the light boxes, shattering the glass.<sup>507</sup> Accordingly, most writings on Al-Ghoussein's *Self Portrait Series* cast it with the frame of misidentification, reading it along the lines that Al-Ghoussein puts forward in his description of the series. For example, arts writer

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<sup>503</sup> Zaharna argues that "*Palestinian* became synonymous with *terrorists, skyjackers, commandos, and guerrillas.*" Zaharna, "The Palestinian Leadership and the American Media," in Yahya R. Kamalipour, ed., *The U.S. Media and the Middle East*, 43. Though my work here is not to analyze media representations, the results of several ProQuest searches in the *New York Times* between 1970 offers insight on the perception and representation of Palestinians in the media: 508 instances of the search terms Palestine AND Terrorism; 271 instances of the search terms "Palestinian terrorists"; 2012 instances of the search terms Palestinian AND terrorists; 2739 instances of the search terms Arab AND terrorists; 471 instances of the search terms "Arab terrorists"; 7 instances of the search terms "Israeli terrorists."

<sup>504</sup> Cocks, "Kaffiyehs."

<sup>505</sup> Al-Ghoussein notes that the police officer's response indicated "even in the Middle East, [the *keffiyeh*] has become almost a symbol of terrorism." Thompson, "Palestinian Identity," 10. It must be noted, however, that Jordan has its own turbulent history with Palestinians, for guerilla groups were based in Jordan. As Gelvin notes, "PLO leaders suspected the Jordanian government of having its own agenda when it came to Palestine (which it did), while the Jordanian government resented the disregard for Jordanian law and sovereign rights show by the Palestinian guerrillas resident in the kingdom." Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 208. For a narrative written in the midst of struggles between the Palestinians and Jordanians in 1971, see *Journal of Palestine Studies*, "The Palestinian Resistance and Jordan," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1971): 162-170.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.* Because of this experience, the TV station head went on to make a short documentary about Al-Ghoussein, which aired on VPRO-TV on 17 October 2004.

<sup>507</sup> Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Beautiful Anguish."

Seth Thompson indicates that “Al-Ghoussein understands how mass media reinforcement can create stereotypical cultural interpretations, a primary issue that he wants the viewer to question and challenge.”<sup>508</sup> Art Dubai director Antonia Carver reads the photographs in terms of “unremitting fodder for the media machine.”<sup>509</sup> But as Thompson suggests, an intriguing aspect of the series stems from the uneasy way in which the figure plays the terrorist stereotype. I push this reading further to argue that the photographs portray a figure who not only does not fit the terrorist narrative but also does not fit the Palestinian counter narrative of resistance. The series reveals a figure whose identity is fraught, for neither is he a terrorist, nor is he a freedom fighter. The series reveals Al-Ghoussein’s uneasy relation to symbols of the Palestinian struggle, for his exilic experience has produced in him a strained sense of belonging due to his physical estrangement from the land. Therefore, rather than express *who* the figure is, the series reveals an unending struggle with the question itself. Al-Ghoussein’s use of the genre of self-portraiture therefore reveals the ways in which the figure does not fit dominating narratives about Palestinian identity. The definition of his identity does not come from within his Palestinian community, nor does it come from outside.

In one of the most poignant photographs of the series, *Untitled 2 (Self Portrait Series) (Looking at Palestine)* (Figure 1.5), Al-Ghoussein stands on the Jordanian banks of the Dead Sea, looking across at Palestine. With his head tightly wrapped in the *keffiyeh*, he stands with his back to the camera, leaving the viewer out of his exchange with a land upon which he has never set foot. He stands alone with his feet firmly planted on an outcropping. The photograph illustrates the Arabic term *ghurbah*, a word that describes a state of estrangement, loneliness and lack of

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<sup>508</sup> Thompson, “Palestinian Identity,” 11.

<sup>509</sup> Carver, “Tarek Al-Ghoussein,” 270.

belonging.<sup>510</sup> For the figure, indeed for all Palestinian exiles, Palestine is unreachable. It is there, yet unattainable. Standing on the bridge that connects Jordan to Palestine after thirty years of exile, the poet Mourid Barghouti described it: “it stretches before me, as touchable as a scorpion, a bird, a well; visible as a field of chalk, as the prints of shoes.”<sup>511</sup> Barghouti’s prose describes Palestine as a place that threatens to disappear. Despite its nearness, the Palestinian exile can not count on getting there, staying there. In fact, once estranged, loss is irreversible, even upon return, for the feeling of displacement cannot be shaken.<sup>512</sup> How can one undo decades of the feeling of estrangement that homelessness produces? Al-Ghoussein’s *Untitled 2 (Self Portrait Series) (Looking at Palestine)* visually illustrates Barghouti’s sentiments. In it, Palestine spans the horizon with hills that disappear into the distance. With clouds covering the hills, it appears as though out of a dream, some imagination. His black clothes interrupt the otherwise subtle colors of earth, water, and sky, and the shape of his body creates the only vertical in a photograph dominated by horizontals. His head occupies the same space as the horizon, interrupting the space of his patria. Palestine seems limitless, though the haze that covers it gives it a quality that sets it apart from the clearly defined and confined space of exile upon which the figure stands. His feet can transport him, but they cannot get him to the place that is literally and figuratively on his mind. His presence is split between two places, one physical and the other metaphorical, a place where he will never belong and a place for which he longs.

*Untitled 5 (Self Portrait Series)* (Figure 4.8) is another emotive photograph, but for wholly different reasons—it references the Palestinian armed resistance, in particular the practice

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<sup>510</sup> Edward Said, “Interiors,” in *The Edward Said Reader*, Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, eds., New York: Vintage, 2000, 274-90; Julie M. Peteet, “Transforming Trust: Dispossession and Empowerment among Palestinian Refugees,” in *Mistrusting Refugees*, 168-186, Valentine Daniel and John C. Knudsen, eds., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 173; Helena Lindholm Schulz (with Juliane Hammer), *The Palestinian Diaspora*, 20.

<sup>511</sup> Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, 6.

<sup>512</sup> Also see Edward Said, *Out of Place* and Susan Slyomovics, *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, 14-15.

of airplane hijacking made infamous in the 1970s.<sup>513</sup> These real-life events were reproduced in Hollywood films, further promulgating the stereotype of the fearsome Palestinian.<sup>514</sup> In *Untitled 5*, a man dressed in black with his head wrapped in the *keffiyeh* walks towards a parked airplane. He is photographed just as he enters the left side of the picture frame. The airplane, from the nose to just past the door, takes up at least half of the picture on the right and all but obscures the horizon. The plane is wedged between a truck on one side and a cart stacked with gray plastic-wrapped packages on the other. Simple analysis would explain away the possibility that the man is preparing to hijack the plane. Commonly used in much of the Middle East, the utilitarian *keffiyeh* could be used to protect his face from the weather.<sup>515</sup> Second, the fact that his face is covered prior to boarding prompts doubt. If he was a hijacker, would this not draw attention and foil his plan? Another contradiction concerns the man's poise. With his hands swinging free, he walks with his head bowed and his posture tired. He does not carry himself with the intensity of focus expected from someone engaged in potentially violent acts. Rather, his bowed head suggests a contemplative figure deep in thought. The Palestinian artist Emily Jacir identified an ambiguity in the series, which she described as "the illusiveness of the figure." She goes on to ask "is he coming or going? Is he free or imprisoned? Is he a terrorist, a hero, or a failed figure? Is he victorious or defeated? Am I the antagonist or the victim?"<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> In the 1960s and 70s, several factions of the Palestinian liberation movement engaged in armed struggle, most famously airplane hijacking. One well-known example took place on June 27, 1976, when an Air France flight with 248 passengers was hijacked by Palestinians and Germans who demanded the release of 40 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. See "Airliner With 257 Is Hijacked to Uganda: Plane With 257 Hijacked from Athens," *New York Times*, 28 June 1976: 1. Also "Hostages Freed as Israelis Raid Uganda Airport: Commandos in 3 Planes Rescue 105-Casualties Unknown Israelis Raid Uganda Airport And Free Hijackers' Hostages," *New York Times*, July 4, 1976, 1.

<sup>514</sup> For an analysis of the primarily negative Hollywood portrayals of Arabs, see Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, revised and updated edition (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2009).

<sup>515</sup> Thompson's informal survey in the United Arab Emirates indicates this. See Thompson, "Palestinian Identity," 11.

<sup>516</sup> Al-Ghoussein, "Artist Conversation with Emily Jacir," in *Tarek Al-Ghoussein In Absentia*, 27.

The questions she asks further points to Al-Ghoussein's inability to fit within any identity paradigm, which has ironically become an expression of Palestinian identity poignantly described by authors like Edward Said and Mourid Barghouti.<sup>517</sup> It relates to Handala, a symbol that resonates with Al-Ghoussein's photographs, though ironically the photographer knew nothing of it during production. Handala is a cartoon character created in 1969 by the Palestinian political cartoonist Naji al-Ali (b. circa 1938), who was assassinated in London in 1987 (the identity of his assassin was never determined). The character is autobiographical and depicts a poor ten-year-old boy, barefoot and dressed in ragged clothes (Figure 4.9).<sup>518</sup> Always portrayed with his back to the viewer, he observes the social and political calamities in the Arab world. Middle East scholar Sune Haugbolle writes that al-Ali has become a "cultural icon, in the sense that [his] work provides an aesthetic language through which the diverse historical memory of the Arab twentieth century is articulated and negotiated."<sup>519</sup> The character is a famous and important icon in Palestinian culture and is heavily associated with resilience.<sup>520</sup> Because Al-Ghoussein has never lived in Palestine, others' memories shape his relationship to it, a relationship that is mediated and distanced.<sup>521</sup> The idea of homeland and belonging are therefore

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<sup>517</sup> Edward Said, Out of Place, 1999; Barghouti, I Saw Ramallah, 2000. Also see Rashid Khalidi, Palestinian Identity; Shafeeq Ghabra, Palestinians in Kuwait: The Family and Politics of Survival (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987); Julie M. Peteet, "Transforming Trust: Dispossession and Empowerment among Palestinian Refugees," in Mistrusting Refugees, eds., E. Valentine Daniel and John C. Knudsen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Rosemary Sayigh, Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries (London: Zed Press, 1979).

<sup>518</sup> Handala's story is based on al-Ali's own history: he was expelled from his village in Palestine at the age of ten and lived in the Ain al Hilweh refugee camp near Sidon, Lebanon. See Sune Haugbolle, "Naji al-Ali and the Iconography of Arab Secularism," in Visual Culture in the Modern Middle East: Rhetoric of the Image, eds., Christiane Gruber and Sune Haugbolle (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 231-259.

<sup>519</sup> Haugbolle, "Naji al-Ali," in Gruber and Haugbolle, eds., Visual Culture in the Modern Middle East, 232.

<sup>520</sup> For a sampling of al-Ali's cartoons, see Naji al-Ali, with an introduction by Joe Sacco, A Child in Palestine: The Cartoons of Naji al-Ali (London and New York: Verso, 2009). The film *Naji al-Ali: An Artist with a Vision* describes his work in relation to political developments of the 1980s. See Kasim Abid, *Naji al-Ali: An Artist with a Vision*, directed and produced by Kasim Abid (Brooklyn, Icarus Films, 1999), DVD.

<sup>521</sup> Helena Lindholm Schulz with Juliane Hammer, The Palestinian Diaspora, 100-101; Rashid Khalidi, Palestinian Identity, 153.

fraught, for memories that are not his own are layered with his lived experiences, which span multiple continents, cultures, and languages.<sup>522</sup>

*Untitled 1 (Self Portrait Series)* (2003) (Figure 4.10) refers to the symbol of the stone, which especially became a symbol of the Palestinian struggle during the first *Intifada*. Because they had no guns or artillery, they transformed ordinary objects such as rocks and bottles (with which they created Molotov cocktails) to attack occupying forces. Often, even children joined in the opposition. The Palestinian poet Nizar Qabbani wrote a poem about these children. The first stanza reads: “With stones in their hands / they defy the world / and come to us like good tidings. / They burst with anger and love, and they fall / while we remain a herd of polar bears: / a body armored against weather.”<sup>523</sup> Qabbani’s poem is an attempt to stir people into action, a call to stand alongside the young, whose involvement especially highlighted the David and Goliath nature of the Palestinian struggle. In one especially well-known photograph, a child named Faris Odeh stands at the ready, aiming his rock at an oncoming tank (Figure 4.3). The ground is strewn with stones and Israeli soldiers loom in the background.<sup>524</sup> Al-Ghoussein’s photograph has an entirely different energy: he walks alongside a truck bed loaded with boulders too large for him to throw, much less budge. He seems oblivious of them, again walking with his head in a contemplative bow. Here Al-Ghoussein uses caricature by casting this significant symbol of the Palestinian struggle, the stone, as oversized. It is not so much comic, but it evokes questions about the figure’s estrangement from the Palestinian struggle. Unlike Handala, whose acts of witness is read as a form of grassroots resistance, Al-Ghoussein seems to walk away from this, turning his back on the possibility of popular struggle. While Al-Ghoussein refers to the terrorist

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<sup>522</sup> Mason discusses the notion of multilayered identity among diasporic and exiled Palestinians. See Victoria Mason, “Children of the ‘Idea of Palestine.’”

<sup>523</sup> Nizar Qabbani, “Children Bearing Stones,” reprinted in Lockman and Beinun, eds., *Intifada*, 100.

<sup>524</sup> A Google image search for “Palestine child tank rock” yields several images of children confronting tanks. This not only indicates the predominance of such encounters, but also the power of such an image.

in his description of *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)*, the figure is indistinguishable from the resistance fighter.

Al-Ghoussein's series calls to mind Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980), in which she appropriates the genre of B-movies and performs well-worn stereotypes of women in photographs that take on the look of film stills. In *Untitled Film Still #13* (1978) (Figure 3.10), a young blond reaches up for a book in a library. The tight shot gives the impression of a closed, almost claustrophobic space, as though she has no where to go. With her head upturned, she looks over her left shoulder as though something suddenly caught her attention. Neither smiling nor frowning, her neutral face reveals that she has yet to gauge the situation, but the unlikely direction towards which she looks—up—indicates something unusual and potentially dangerous. Early readings of this series connected them to a critical postmodernism and feminist critique.<sup>525</sup> Because Sherman's photos refer to non-existent films, art historian Douglas Crimp argues that they absent a narrative that is nonetheless inferred. This simultaneous presence and absence can also be read in feminist readings of *Untitled Film Stills*. As visual culture analyst Judith Williamson has argued, audiences understand the figures that Sherman plays in her photographs because of stereotypes based on an essentialized and well-known femininity: frail, vulnerable and naïve. Crimp comments on this aspect of Sherman's series, indicating that her "self is therefore understood as contingent upon the possibilities provided by the culture in which Sherman participates, not by some inner impulse," an argument that highlights the constructed nature of identity.<sup>526</sup> Crimp's is a postmodern reading of identity, which rejects the idea of innate characteristics to identity categories. Despite these critical readings of Sherman's work, as art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau shows, Sherman's work would later be "critically recast" in

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<sup>525</sup> These two readings were most famously put forth by Douglas Crimp and Judith Williamson. See Crimp, "Pictures;" Judith Williamson, "Images of 'Woman,'" *Screen Education* (Nov-Dec 1982): 102-116.

<sup>526</sup> Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *October* 15 (Winter 1980): 99.

ways that seek to “renaturalize” the femininity her work seeks to deconstruct.<sup>527</sup> Through an examination of writings on Sherman, Solomon-Godeau reveals a resilient desire to scopically consume the woman, prompting the question of whether the appropriation of stereotypes in art can indeed be critical and the need for a sustained practice of critique.<sup>528</sup>

Twenty-four years separate Al-Ghoussein’s project from Sherman’s, but they have a great deal in common. Both deal with constructions of identity. They do so in a process that utilizes the artists’ own body, therefore putting into question the relationship between self-portraiture and autobiography. Crimp writes, Sherman’s “photographs reverse the terms of art and autobiography. They use art not to reveal the artist’s true self, but to show the self as an imaginary construct. There is no real Cindy Sherman in these photographs; there are only the guises she assumes.”<sup>529</sup> While Al-Ghoussein’s statement about the *Self Portrait Series* engages a similar critique of Palestinian stereotypes and mass media, I argue that his work diverges from Sherman’s in a significant way. Readings of Sherman’s work have importantly posited the constructed nature of identity, thereby also rejecting the possibility that the photographs are self-portraits, despite her presence in them. The strength lies in her convincing portrayal of a particular feminine type. Conversely, the strength in Al-Ghoussein’s photographs lies in his *unconvincing* performance of the figure, whether terrorist or freedom fighter. A space is created through his reluctant portrayal, in which I locate Al-Ghoussein’s self-representation. What I mean to say is that, while the series purports to examine media representations, it simultaneously reveals Al-Ghoussein’s ambiguous relationship to Palestinian identity more generally. This

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<sup>527</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Suitable for Framing: The Critical Recasting of Cindy Sherman,” *Parkett* 29 (1991): 113-114.

<sup>528</sup> My use of the term “scopically consume” is a reference to Laura Mulvey’s article on women in film, whereby she shows how formal decisions such as framing, camera angles, and lighting depict women in ways that enable symbolic and visual consumption. See Mulvey, “Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure.”

<sup>529</sup> Crimp, “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism,” 99.

ambiguity appears in the figure's disregard for the symbols of the Palestinian narrative: the stones, the airplane, the scarf. While Sherman's flawless performances reveal identity as a construction, Al-Ghoussein's photographs refer to the possibility for an alternative script in the narrative of Palestinian national identity from exile.

### *Masculinity and Palestinian identity*

The work that Al-Ghoussein's *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)* does in relation to this alternative script is subtle. He does not engage his critiques head-on, nor is he unabashed in his perspective. Rather, there is a quietude in his work that offers space for reflection. Here I turn to the subject of gender in the context of Palestinian national identity. As typical in the context of nationalist projects, narratives about the Palestinian struggle against Zionism are replete with culturally normative displays of gender. For example, women's association with the private realm versus the male-dominated public has posited issues of the nation (public) as a male endeavor.<sup>530</sup> Such simplistic binaries have been challenged in a considerable body of literature, and in the Palestinian context, literature scholar Amy Zalman has highlighted the dissonance between representations of women in Palestinian literature and the roles women play in real life, arguing that idealized images of women are manifestations of the nationalist desire for a verdant land upon which the male can express agency and ownership.<sup>531</sup> Literature and ethnic studies scholar Steven Salaita refers to the "symbolic merger of the [female] body with the landscape," a

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<sup>530</sup> For examinations of gendered nature of nationalism, see Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1998); Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller, eds., *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition* (London: Routledge, 1998); Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón and Mino Moallem, eds., *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalism, Transnational Feminism, and the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>531</sup> Amy Zalman, "Gender and the Palestinian Narrative of Return in Two Novels by Ghassan Kanafani," *The Arab Studies Journal* 10/11, no. 2/1 (Fall 2002/Spring 2003): 17-43.

technique long employed by male Palestinian authors.<sup>532</sup> For example, in his 1998 novel *Scattered Like Seeds*, Shaw Dallal describes his male protagonist's impressions as he embraces his lover: "her breasts remind him of the gentle hills of his homeland, her smooth soft skin of its plants, and her long, light brown hair of the rays of its sun."<sup>533</sup> Though common, such representations have not gone without criticism. For example, Theresa Saliba argues that in Liana Badr's 1979 novel *A Compass for the Sunflower*, the author challenges the gendered representations of nationalist rhetoric through its reconfiguration into a transnational struggle based on "principles of justice."<sup>534</sup> Similarly, in visual art, artists have often equated the female body with the land of Palestine. In his highly detailed ink drawings, Abdul Rahman Al-Muzayen depicts a Palestinian women in traditional dress, the *thob*, on which designs comprised of stones, wheat, homes and date palms are embroidered, thereby representing the land of Palestine (Figure 4.11). Other artists who engage similar uses of the female body include Sliman Mansur, Ismail Shammout, and Nabil Anani. Vera Tamari and Penny Johnson describe the prevalent representations of women as mothers, particularly peasants, in Palestinian art, writing that "where the woman, once lost as mother, is also lost as nation, homeland, and land, and the artist must recover and reconstitute this lost other."<sup>535</sup> This reconstitution takes place in the hands of the male artist.

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<sup>532</sup> See Steven Salaita, "Scattered Like Seeds: Palestinian Prose Goes Global," *Studies in the Humanities* 30, no. 1-2 (June 2003): 48. Examples include Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Men in the Sun* and *On the Hills of God* by Ibrahim Fawal. See Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun and other Palestinian Stories* (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1983); Ibrahim Fawal, *On the Hills of God* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2006).

<sup>533</sup> Shaw J. Dallal, *Scattered Like Seeds: A Novel* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 190.

<sup>534</sup> Saliba, "A Country Beyond Reach," in Majaj, Sunderman and Saliba, eds., *Intersections*, 2002.

<sup>535</sup> Vera Tamari and Penny Johnson, "Loss and Vision: Representations of Women in Palestinian Art Under Occupation," in *Discourse and Palestine: Power, Text and Content*, 162-172, Annelies Moors, Toine van Teeffelen, Ilham Abu Ghazaleh, Sharif Kanaana, eds., Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1995, 168. Also see Tina Malhi Sherwell, "Imaging Palestine as the Motherland," in Tal Ben Zvi and Yael Lerer, eds., *Self-Portrait: Palestinian Women's Art*, 160-166, Tel Aviv: Andalus, 2001; Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, London: Reaktion Books, 2006, 62-64. Also Gannit Ankori, "Dis-Orientalisms: Displaced Bodies, Embodied Displacements in Contemporary Palestinian Art," in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, 59-90, Sara Ahmed et al., eds., Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2003. The folklorist al Sarisi indicates that women and land were equally constituent of the Palestinian

In his consideration of the role of gender in the ideological underpinnings of Palestinian nationalism, political scientist Joseph Massad similarly highlights what he describes a *procreative* masculinity in his examination of communiqués and charters issued by the PLO.<sup>536</sup> As Massad shows, the Palestinian Nationalist Charter (PNC) depicts the loss of Palestine as an act of sexual violence, referring to Zionist conquest as a rape of the Palestinian homeland—represented as a mother—and rendering the sullied feminized nation unable to produce legitimate children.<sup>537</sup> Massad shows that both Zionists and Palestinians drew from European nationalist discourses to produce heteronormative gendered representations of their nationalist projects. He draws on authors Benedict Anderson and George Mosse to argue that the naturalization of national identity and gender were synchronous processes that “legitimized the dominance of men over women.”<sup>538</sup> In the case of Palestine, the transmission of Palestinian identity was dependent on time and place, for whereas before the “rape” in 1947, all Arabs who resided in Palestine would be defined as Palestinian; afterwards, being born to a Palestinian *father*, whether inside or outside of Palestine, was the necessary prerequisite. “In sum, while the land as mother was responsible for the reproduction of Palestinians until 1947, the rape disqualified her from this role. It is now fathers who reproduce the nation.”<sup>539</sup> In later communiqués, Palestinian masculinity is defined as one able to launch armed struggle and

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peasant male’s honor. See Umar Abd al-Rahman al-Sarisi, Peasant Folklores in Palestinian Society: Studies and Texts, Beirut: al Muassasah al Arabiyah lil Dirasat wa al Nashr, 1980, 137 (in Arabic).

<sup>536</sup> As the Palestinian leadership was clandestine, communiqués were secretly printed and distributed in the West Bank and Gaza then broadcast by radio stations in Damascus and Baghdad. Communiqués distributed until 20 November 1988 are reprinted in Zachary Lockman and Joel Beinin, eds., “Appendix II: Communiques from the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising,” in Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation, 327-399, Boston: South End Press, 1989.

<sup>537</sup> Massad, 470-471.

<sup>538</sup> Massad, 471. See Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, London: Verso, 1991; George Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe, New York: Howard Fertig, 1985.

<sup>539</sup> Massad, 472. Massad links anti-colonial nationalism to European Enlightenment and shows that paternity-as-national-source paradigm derived from its narratives.

possess a bourgeois economic status (the latter was especially directed to Palestinians working in the Gulf countries).<sup>540</sup>

While gendered nationalist representations figured ideologically in the PNC and communiqués, the Palestinian male body itself became a site charged with gendered connotations. During the first *Intifada*, young Palestinian men who resisted against the occupation were met with what anthropologist Julie Peteet describes as the Israel Defense Force's (IDF) "ritualized beatings."<sup>541</sup> Though intended to function as a fear tactic to deter others from engaging in acts of resistance, the scarred and marked bodies that resulted from the beatings were re-signified by Palestinians to represent "honor, manhood and moral superiority."<sup>542</sup> Beatings and detention were "construed as rites of passage into manhood, with its attendant status and responsibilities, and...as initiation into underground political leadership."<sup>543</sup> Esmail al-Nashif similarly discusses the "materialization" of the Palestinian masculine and heterosexual body in the context of the extensive Israeli prison system through an examination of written and verbal representations produced by both the colonizer and colonized.<sup>544</sup> Representations and perceptions of masculinity figured significantly both in the resistance as well as in the attempt to squash it.<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Massad, 477-480.

<sup>541</sup> Julie Peteet, "Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian Intifada: a Cultural Politics of Violence" *American Ethnologist* 21(1), (Feb 1994), 31.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>544</sup> See Esmail al-Nashif, "Attempts at Liberation: Materializing the Body and Building Community among Palestinian Political Captives," *The Arab Studies Journal* 12/13, no. 2/1 (Fall 2004/Spring 2005): 46-79. Also see Esmail al-Nashif, *Palestinian Political Prisoners: Identity and Community*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008. For a history of political imprisonment in Palestine, see A. Qasim, *Introduction to the Political Imprisonment Experience in the Zionist Prisons*, Beirut: al Umah House Press, 1986 (in Arabic); F. Abu al Haj, *The Knights of the Intifada Talking from Behind the Bars*, Jerusalem: Jamayat al Dirasat al Arabieh, 1992 (in Arabic).

<sup>545</sup> Liana Badr's novel *A Compass for the Sunflower* illustrates the dialogue between genders that emerged as in Palestinian nationalist discourse in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Saliba, "A Country Beyond Reach," in Majaj, Sunderman and Saliba, eds., *Intersections*, 141-147.

Despite these redemptive attempts, anthropologist Amalia Sa'ar and sociologist Taghreed Yahia-Younis have argued that Palestinian masculinity is in crisis.<sup>546</sup> This was apparent during the first *Intifada*, when the IDF began the use of sexual torture and rape in response to the Palestinian re-signification of the scarred body as a masculine symbol. Peteet writes that these tactics “deprive young men of claims to manhood and masculinity. One cannot return from prison and describe forms of torture that violate the most intimate realm of gendered selfhood.”<sup>547</sup> In the context of Palestinian male citizens of Israel in the early 2000s, Sa'ar and Yahia-Younis indicate that their political and economic status “does not allow for the realization of militaristic masculinities...while alternative scripts of less violent masculinities are also hardly viable for them.”<sup>548</sup> In response to this lack of agency, intercommunity violence has increased. In the cases Massad, Peteet, and Sa'ar and Yahia-Younis describe, masculinity is conceived of in culturally normative terms, where men protect and defend their land and families through engagement either with violence or through the acquisition of financial means, means that have become rarified.

The gender Al-Ghoussein performs in his *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)* could not be further from the masculinities described above. There is no offensive stance, no riches displayed, no children bearing his name and Palestinian identity, no community. He seems distracted, with

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<sup>546</sup> Also see Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* (Oxford, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 212. This research figures as part of the growing field of masculinity studies in the context of the Middle East. For an edited volume on the subject, see Mai Ghoussein and Emma Sinclair-Webb, eds., *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2000). For the Palestinian context in specific, see Amal Amireh, “Between Complicity and Subversion: Body Politics in Palestinian National Narrative,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 748-772; Penny Johnson and Eileen Kuttab, “Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Intifada,” *Feminist Review*, no. 69 (Winter 2001): 21-43; Amira Hass, “Arms and Virility: The Phallic Manifestations of the Last Israeli-Palestinian Round of Bloodshed,” (lecture, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, April 8, 2008).

<sup>547</sup> Peteet, “Male Gender,” 45.

<sup>548</sup> This study attempts to make sense of growing violence among Palestinian communities in Israel, arguing that the underlying reason is the lack of political and economic opportunities for Palestinian men. See Amalia Sa'ar and Taghreed Yahia-Younis, “Masculinity in Crisis: The Case of Palestinians in Israel,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 3 (December 2008): 322.

his guard let down, and nowhere near ready to fight. Al-Ghoussein's series echoes the assertion of Sa'ar and Yahia-Younis that Palestinian masculinity is in crisis, going so far as to depict a Palestinian masculinity victimized and under attack. Two photographs particularly do so, *Untitled 4* (Figure 4.12) and *Untitled 6* (both from 2003) (Figure 4.13). In the former, the figure is caught at the end of a narrow space lined on the right with animal carcasses. In the latter, the figure's blurred body darts to the left in an attempt to dodge bullets, the presence of which are indicated by police targets that hang on both sides. The two photographs differ from the others in the series because of the energy displayed. Different from historic photographs of Palestinian resistance, which expectedly portray strength and courage (Figure 4.14), here the figure is running for his life. In contrast to the rest of the series, *Untitled 4* and *6* are photographed in cramped indoor spaces that provide the protagonist no possibility of escape. Darkness casts the figure in shallow spaces, and his death is foretold by the blur—his already disappearing body. While death may be a certain fate in occupied Palestine, I read Al-Ghoussein's reference to demise metaphorically and in relation to narratives that produce Palestinian identity. Wearing the *keffiyeh*, he draws on layers of appropriation and signification—from Yasser Arafat's use of the scarf to grant the struggle historical authenticity by reference to the 1936-'39 peasant rebellion (Figure 4.15) to the scarf's continued resonance aura of resistance in the fashion world (Figure 4.16). Juxtaposing the scarf with the "symbols" of Palestine in a way that makes obvious their signifying work, Al-Ghoussein's *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)* is an attempt to halt the telling and retelling of a narrative that is going nowhere. Enter Sisyphus. While the photographer describes the series as a critique of the media's depiction of the Palestine-Israel situation as cyclical and endless, I argue that the series similarly (and perhaps unwittingly) critiques the Palestinian narrative, which purports to produce an authentic identity to which Al-Ghoussein has

no access. One such narrative is that of nationalist masculinity: the photographs refer to resistance, yet the figure does not act on it. The presence of the scarf is therefore elegiac in his reference to Palestinian resistance and normative masculinity, and following Massad, a hegemonic Palestinian identity based on a masculinist nationalist narrative.

Al-Ghoussein's subtle critique of stereotypical masculinity in the Palestinian context falls in line with postcolonial feminist scholar Anna Ball's, who identifies "a desire to reimagine and reconstruct Palestinian masculinity, and hence, society" in her analysis of Palestinian literature and film.<sup>549</sup> Using a postcolonial feminist lens, Ball shows how creative practitioners have produced representations of Palestinian men in this context of crisis in ways that denaturalize the discourse of nationalist masculinity. This radical approach to the emasculation process inherent to the Israeli occupation of Palestine allows for the formulation of alternative masculinities. Ball describes a masculinity that is apt to that which figures in Al-Ghoussein's photographs: it is one that is "self-aware, enduring and cerebral" and involves "a process of self-scrutiny" that must be undergone alone.<sup>550</sup> These alternative forms of masculinity resonate with Al-Ghoussein's solitary figure who cannot abide by what Benedict Anderson describes as the "deep, horizontal comradeship...[based on] fraternity" that forms the basis of nationalism.<sup>551</sup>

### *Landscapes of Palestine: The Absented Nation*

In my reading of Al-Ghoussein's work, I divide his practice into two overlapping themes: the symbols of Palestine and landscapes of Palestine. I begin this section on the landscapes of Palestine with a photograph from *Untitled (B Series)* (2005-2006) (Figure 4.17, Figure 4.19), a

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<sup>549</sup> Anna Ball examines Elia Suleiman's film *Divine Intervention (Yadun Ilahiyya)*, Hany Abu-Assad's film *Paradise Now (Al-Janna Al-A'an)* and Samir El-Youssef's short story "The Day the Beast Got Thirsty." Anna Ball, *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 74.

<sup>550</sup> Ball, *Palestinian Literature*, 90.

<sup>551</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 224.

series that evidences the photographer's transition from a more literal examination of Palestinian identity through the use of symbols to his use of abstraction. Ironically, in this case, abstraction goes hand in hand with his reality, for his is an examination of a land he has never experienced. Abstraction therefore provides him with both the theoretical and the formal tools to present the landscapes of Palestine, or more specifically, the landscapes of exile.

With Al-Ghoussein's *Untitled (B Series)*, the photographer evidences a desire to move away from obvious references to Palestine, even if the concrete slabs in the photographs clearly reference the Israeli-built 709-kilometer-long wall surrounding the West Bank. In this discussion of symbols of the Palestinian experience, the wall is today foremost among them. It is comprised of "eight-meter high concrete slabs, electronic fences, barbed wire, radar, cameras, deep trenches, observation posts and patrol roads," which surrounds the West Bank (construction began in 2002 and is ongoing).<sup>552</sup> In some places, it exceeds the Green Line drawn between Israel and the Palestinian territories after the 1967 War, thereby allowing for Israel's illegal expropriation of Palestinian land.<sup>553</sup> The wall is referred to by several names: separation wall, security fence, separation barrier, separation fence, and most controversially, the Apartheid wall because it walls in pockets of Palestinian communities, oftentimes separating families from each other and dispossessing many of their lands.<sup>554</sup> The wall is one component in a system that regulates and restricts the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank. Also included are checkpoints and Israeli-only (identified by cars with yellow license plates) bypass roads, which connect residents

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<sup>552</sup> Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London; New York: Verso, 2007), 161.

<sup>553</sup> Ghazi-Walid Falah, "War, peace and land seizure in Palestine's border area," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 5 (2004): 955-975.

<sup>554</sup> For examples of its reference as the "Apartheid wall," see Samer Alatout, "Towards a bio-territorial conception of power: Territory, population, and environmental narratives in Palestine and Israel," *Political Geography* 25, no. 6 (August 2006): 601-621; Weizman, *Hollow Land*; A sampling of texts in which the term "separation wall" is found includes Zeev Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israeli Security and Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Graham Usher, "Unmaking Palestine: On Israel, the Palestinians, and the Wall," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2005): 25-43.

in West Bank Jewish settlements to the rest of Israel. Though the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the wall and indicates that it is in violation of international law and should immediately be dismantled, the wall remains.<sup>555</sup>

In describing *Untitled (A Series)* and *Untitled (B Series)* (both from 2005), the two series he produced after *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)*, Al-Ghoussein explained:

The term ‘identity’ is highly contested and can be taken to mean many things depending on the context. Nevertheless, there has been widespread agreement that significant aspects of identity are related to a particular place; hence, national identity results from connections to an individual’s country of origin. As I attempt to come to terms with the issues related to my personal experience as a Palestinian-Kuwaiti that has never lived within the borders of Palestine, it has become apparent that this current body of work seeks to transcend the obvious reference to the unethical “defense barrier” being constructed in Palestine. The “walls” and “mounds” that appear throughout the images also speak of my own individual struggles irrespective of the conventional notions of national identity.<sup>556</sup>

Al-Ghoussein’s statement evidences engagement in a process of redefining his national identity because, as he explains, he has no access to the place. In this process, he uses symbols of the Palestinian experience to do so, thereby generating tension between the more literal depictions of the wall and the metaphorical examination of the notion of belonging. In an act of defiance against the power evinced by the wall and an assertion of identity despite that power, Al-Ghoussein stated, “we build our own walls.”<sup>557</sup> In *Untitled 10 (B Series)* (2005) (Figure 4.17), the figure stands with his back to the camera. He no longer wears the *keffiyeh* (he stops using it in this series), but maintains his all black attire. He is positioned between two concrete walls that occupy the whole picture frame; only a slit down the middle reveals the horizon that will figure prominently in his later series. The photograph is comprised of vertical and horizontal lines that

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<sup>555</sup> International Court of Justice, “Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” advisory opinion, I.C.J. Reports 2004, accessed August 1, 2013, <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/131/1671.pdf>.

<sup>556</sup> Tarek Al-Ghoussein, “Untitled & Self Portrait Series,” accessed August 1, 2011, <http://www.daratafunun.org/main/activit/curentl/febo6/tarek/tarek06.html>.

<sup>557</sup> Tarek Al-Ghoussein, interview with author, Nîmes, France, May 3, 2008.

variously intersect to create a tableau of rectangles. A rusted brown brace extends down from the top of the frame and is crossed by a horizontal line of concrete. This line ends near the center of the photograph and is met by a slit of sky that projects from Al-Ghoussein's head. Another horizontal line crosses the other wall at its halfway point. The rectangles these lines produce are disturbed by mottles of darker grey on the concrete, as well as a bit of earth upon which the figure stands.

In contrast to the unimpeded visual access to the walls that Al-Ghoussein offers his viewers, the object of the figure's gaze is denied. In doing so, the viewer must imagine that which the figure sees. This strategy was described by artist and curator Haig Avazian as an "attempt to disengage from the position of spectatorship in order to engage affectively in a distanced reality."<sup>558</sup> The distanced reality to which Avazian refers is the lived experience of Palestine. In his installations, Al-Ghoussein elicits a psychological response by constructing what evokes a visceral experience. In exhibitions in Amman, Nîmes, Sharjah, and Zamość, he suspended photographs printed on rice paper, producing diaphanous objects of art viewable from behind (Figure 4.18 and Figure 4.19).<sup>559</sup> Visitors walked through a maze of photographs in dimly lit gallery spaces, casting shadows on both the photographs and the space.<sup>560</sup> The installation produces contradictory effects: the translucence of the paper contrasts with the physicality of the wall. One reviewer referred to the feeling of calm in the *Ideal City—Invisible Cities* installation "in contrast with the images of exclusion."<sup>561</sup> Al-Ghoussein indicates a relationship between his rice paper prints and Japanese Shoji screens, "where the public and private spaces are separated

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<sup>558</sup> Wilson-Goldie, "Beautiful Anguish."

<sup>559</sup> Al-Ghoussein has used this approach to installation at several exhibitions: *Walls and Checkpoints* (Amman, Jordan, 2006), at *Sharjah Biennial 6* (Sharjah, UAE, 2003), *Ideal City—Invisible Cities* (Zamość, Poland, 2006), and *Scenes of the South* (Carré D'Art—Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes, France, 2008).

<sup>560</sup> This discussion derives from my experience, as I attended the exhibition in Nîmes in 2008. Though I did not see the *Untitled (B Series)*, I surmise the impact of the installation based on my experience with the installation.

<sup>561</sup> Alia Rayyan, "Going Underground: From Palestine to Poland, artists explore urban living deep in the heart of Eastern Europe," *Canvas* (September 2006): 9.

by paper.” He goes on: “I was thinking of the wall in Palestine not as a physical barrier issue, but relating it to psychological issues that affect Palestinians much more strongly than the actual physical wall.” By printing the wall photographs on fragile paper, Al-Ghoussein suggests that, though the wall can be easily physically destroyed, its psychological impact may be a more challenging hurdle. I read the installation as the psychological space in which the audience comes to terms with the notion of inside and out, belonging and not, for in the installation, there is no public and private. It is a series of failed attempts to distinguish between the two, which emerges as a triumph of sorts, even if muted.

Beginning with *Untitled (C Series)* (2007), the landscape begins to dominate Al-Ghoussein’s work. In this series, the only one that adheres to a narrative sequence, he focuses on the idea of transience:

Although I did not set out to investigate the notion of transience, this series developed from a process of exploring ideas related to land and place. While unexpected, the strong emphasis on longing led to a consideration of changing landscapes and ephemeral moments that are fixed in time rather than located in a specific place.<sup>562</sup>

The series is colorful and vibrant, the elements of which include a bright blue tarpaulin, a white canvas tent, soft blue sky, and monotone grey sand. The figure stands out against these colors in black as he exerts an energetic agency unseen in earlier series. Grabbing the tarpaulin by a corner, he drags it along the sand in *Untitled 11 (C Series)* (Figure 4.20), and in *Untitled 7 (C Series)* (Figure 4.21) and *Untitled 9 (C Series)* (Figure 4.22), he is all but obscured by it as the wind tosses it up into the air. Later, the tarpaulin is anchored over a white tent; again the wind gives it dramatic and voluptuous shapes. Al-Ghoussein stands at the door of the tent in *Untitled 3 (C Series)* (Figure 4.23). He takes a broad stance with his back turned to the audience. The wind-blown tarp covers his head, taking an organic shape of curves and waves. He stands upon a rug

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<sup>562</sup> Tarek Al-Ghoussein, “Tarek Al-Ghoussein,” in *Self Portraits, A, B and C Series* (University of Sharjah College of Fine Art and Design exhibition catalogue, Rewak Gallery, Sharjah, December 2007), np.

that is all but covered with sand, and his shirt and pants are similarly wind blown. All around, the sand is rippled; only the footsteps the figure took to arrive at his spot disturb their pattern.

As the Palestinian poet Jabra Ibrahim Jabra indicates in the title of his poem “In the Deserts of Exile,” desert and exile were synonymous in the Palestinian experience.<sup>563</sup> The subject of land is one that repeats in Palestinian literature, and its presence is not one that has eluded scholars. The exiled Palestinian author Fawaz Turki described the gravity of the relationship when he wrote, “man and his environment are two interdependent subsystems, never separable in their functions. They make up a unified system of life-facts that can be separated only by abstraction. A Palestinian estranged from his land is, in effect, repudiated as a human being.”<sup>564</sup> Similarly, representations of land figure to a large extent in Palestinian visual art as in Samia Halaby’s brightly painted and cut out pieces of canvas, *From the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River*, (2003) (Figure 4.24), Vera Tamari’s miniature olive tree sculptures and photographs in *Tale of a Tree*, (1999-ongoing) (Figure 4.25), Yazan Khalili’s night time landscape photographs in *Landscape of Darkness* (2009) (Figure 4.26), Jawad Al-Malhi’s panoramic photographic collages of the settlement-pocked Palestinian landscape in *House Number 197* (2009) (Figure 4.27), and Emily Jacir’s evocation of land via its absence in the lives of exiles in *Where We Come From* (2001-2003) (Figure 4.28, Figure 4.29).<sup>565</sup> For many Palestinian exiles, the harsh desert of the Arabian Gulf was both a literal and metaphorical place. It was literal because, like Al-Ghoussein, many Palestinians lived their exile in the Gulf,

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<sup>563</sup> See Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, “In the Deserts of Exile,” in *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*, eds. Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 225.

<sup>564</sup> Fawaz Turki, “Meaning in Palestinian History: Text and Context,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 3 (1981): 371-383, quote from 373. Also see Salaita, “Scattered Like Seeds;” Salam Mir, “Palestinian Literature: Occupation and Exile,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (March 2013): 110-129.

<sup>565</sup> This list exemplifies an argument made by the Palestinian artist and writer Kamal Boullata when he wrote that Palestinian artists in exile (Halaby and Jacir) tend to produce representations of the land in abstract form. See Kamal Boullata, *The Recovery of Place: A Study of Contemporary Palestinian Art* (Tunis: Arab Organization for Education, Culture and Art, 2000) (in Arabic).

especially Kuwait.<sup>566</sup> It was metaphorical because writers and artists used the desert to illustrate the contrast between their lives in and outside of Palestine in what writer Ghassan Kanafani described as “poetry of resistance.”<sup>567</sup> Jabra writes,

Spring after spring,  
In the desert of exile,  
What are we doing with our love,  
When our eyes are full of frost and dust?  
.....  
O land of ours where our childhood passed  
Like dreams in the shade of the orange-grove,  
Among the almond-trees in the valley—  
Remember us now wandering  
Among the thorns of the desert,  
Wandering in the rocky mountains;  
Remember us now  
In the tumult of cities beyond deserts and seas.  
Remember us  
With our eyes full of dust  
That never clears in our ceaseless wandering  
They crushed the flowers on the hills around us,  
Destroyed the houses over our heads,  
Scattered our torn remains,  
Then unfolded the desert before us,  
With valleys writhing in hunger

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<sup>566</sup> Palestinians were the largest population (approximately 400,000) of migrant laborers in Kuwait until the Iraqi invasion in 1990, when the majority were expelled because of Yasser Arafat’s allegiance with then Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. Hammer, 2005, 93-94 and Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 211. See Palestine Human Rights Information Center (PHRIC), “A Bittersweet Coming Home: The Experience of Palestinians Returning from the Gulf,” *From the Field: A Monthly Report on Selected Human Rights Issues* (October 1993): 1-7; Ann Mosley Lesch, “Palestinians in Kuwait,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 42-54; Nicholas Van Hear, “Mass Flight in the Middle East: Involuntary Migration and the Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991,” in *Geography and Refugees: Patterns and Processes of Change*, eds. Richard Black and Vaughan Robinson (London and New York: Belhaven Press, 1993), 64-83.; Nicholas Van Hear, “The Impact of Involuntary Mass ‘Return’ to Jordan in the Wake of the Gulf Crisis,” *International Migration Review* 29, no. 2 (June 1995): 352-74; Le Troquer and Rozenn Hommery, “From Kuwait to Jordan: The Palestinians’ Third Exodus,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 37-51. For examinations of Palestinians in the Gulf States in general and before the First Gulf War, see Shafeeq N. Ghabra, *Palestinians in Kuwait: The Family and the Politics of Survival* (Boulder, CO and London: Westview Press, 1987); Laurie Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World: Institution Building and the Search for State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Pamela Ann Smith, “The Palestinian Diaspora, 1948-1985,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15, no. 3 (Spring 1986): 90-108; Are Hovdenak, “On the Gulf Road: Palestinian Adaptations to Labor Migration,” in *Constructing Order: Palestinian Adaptations to Refugee Life*, Are Hovdenak, Jone Pedersen, Dag H. Tuastad and Elia Zureik (Oslo, Norway: FAFO Institute for Applied Science, 1997); Yann Le Troquer and Rozenn Hommery al-Oudat, “From Kuwait to Jordan: The Palestinians’ Third Exodus,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 37-51.

<sup>567</sup> Kanafani coined the term in Ghassan Kanafani, *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine, 1948-1966* (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1966) (in Arabic).

And blue shadows shattered into red thorns.<sup>568</sup>

Replete with imagery, Jabra's poem visualizes Palestinian loss in the form of a desert— ceaseless wandering, thorns, dust, hunger— and contrasts it to the orange groves, almond trees, and hills of flowers in Palestine.<sup>569</sup>

The Palestinian painter Suleiman Mansur indicated that artists similarly produced art with symbols and images that represented Palestinian history and experience.<sup>570</sup> Even though Israel worked to censor expressions of Palestinian culture and identity, artists produced paintings “aimed mostly at the creation of a national identity” by incorporating popular myths, traditions and elements of the landscape such as the olive branch and prickly pear (or *sabr* in Arabic, which also means “patience”).<sup>571</sup> While this work was important in the project of nationalism, art historian Nada Shabout writes that “the development of Palestinian art has largely been held hostage by its content, which affected its valuation as art in its own right.”<sup>572</sup> Even today, as this study evidences, Palestinian art is dominated by the politics of the Palestinian experience.<sup>573</sup>

The earliest phase of painting after the *Nakba* depicted the loss and dispossession recently suffered.<sup>574</sup> The pioneering painter from this period was Ismail Shammout (1930-2006),

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<sup>568</sup> Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, “In the Deserts of Exile,” in Khouri and Algar, eds. *Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*, 225. For a discussion of Jabra's and other exilic poetry, see Barbara M. Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

<sup>569</sup> The remembrance of Palestine before 1948 as idyllic is common among the generation that was expelled, as Rosemary Sayigh's interviews with Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon indicate. See Sayigh, *Palestinians*.

<sup>570</sup> For a discussion of symbolism in revolution iconography in Palestine, see Mohammad Al-Asad, *Palestinian Plastic Arts* (Al-Lathiqiyya, Syria: Dar al Hiwar for Publishing and Distribution, 1985), 66-68 (in Arabic).

<sup>571</sup> Sulaiman Mansur, “The Nakba and Palestinian Painting: An Interview with Sulaiman Mansur,” *Palestine-Israel Journal* 5, no. 2, (1998): 91-95. In her study of Palestinian identity in diaspora, Hammer outlines themes and symbols common to Palestinian poetry and visual art, including the tree that represents rootedness, Jerusalem, the Palestinian woman wearing a robe decorated in traditional embroidery, the Palestinian village, and daily activities such as baking bread, the orange groves of Jaffa, and the olive tree. See Hammer, *Palestinians Born in Exile*, 63-67.

<sup>572</sup> Shabout, *Modern Arab Art*, 52.

<sup>573</sup> For a discussion of key Palestinian artists in this regard including Vera Tamari, Taysir Barakat, Nabil Anani, Khalil Rabah and Suleiman Mansur, see Shakir Hassan Al Said, “Meetings with Artists in the Occupied Territories in Palestine,” in *Dialogue On the Plastic Arts*, Shakir Hassan Al Said, ed. (Amman: Abd al-Hamid Shoman Foundation – Darat Al Funun, 1995), 33-53 (in Arabic).

<sup>574</sup> Suleiman Mansur quoted in *Ibid.*, 93.

a key figure in Palestinian art history. He studied at the College of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1950 and mounted an exhibition of his work in 1953 in Gaza and another one year later in Cairo, in an exhibit inaugurated by Egyptian President Jamal Abdul Nasser. That year, he moved to Italy to study at the Academia De Belle Arti in Rome. He moved to Beirut in 1956, eventually becoming the Director of Arts and National Culture for the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1965, the first Secretary General of the Union of Palestinian Artists in 1969, and the first Secretary General of the Union of Arab Artists in 1971. In 1983, he moved to Kuwait because of Israeli aggression against the PLO, and then left Kuwait for Germany in 1992 during the first Gulf War. He returned to the Arab world, settling in Amman, Jordan, where he lived until his death.<sup>575</sup>

According to art historian Wijdan Ali, Shammout was the first Palestinian artist to “establish a content-oriented movement which focused on Palestinian subjects—specifically the suffering of the people and the loss of their motherland.”<sup>576</sup> Shammout’s posts in the PLO and General Union of Palestinian Artists gave him the position from which to promote the notion that art should be created at the service of the national cause. Like Mansur, art historian Gannit Ankori argues that images produced after the Nakba supplied Palestinians “with tangible foci around which a national collective identity might coalesce.”<sup>577</sup> In *Where to?* (1953) (Figure 4.30), Shammout depicts the long walk he took from his hometown Lydda to the Khan Younis refugee camp in Gaza in 1948. In it, an elderly man walks through a yellow-brown landscape marked prominently by a leafless tree. He is surrounded by distraught young boys: one perches on his shoulder and rests his head upon the old man’s, another distressed boy looks up at him crying, and a third

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<sup>575</sup> Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 128-132. Shammout’s oeuvre can be found online at “Ismail Shammout,” accessed October 4, 2011, <http://www.ismail-shammout.com/gallery/>.

<sup>576</sup> Wijdan Ali, “Modern Arab Art: An Overview,” in Mikdadi, *Forces of Change*, 107. Ismail Shammout discusses the use of allegorical images in his paintings in Ismail Shammout, *Plastic Arts in Palestine* (Kuwait: Al Qabas Printing, 1989), 48-49 (in Arabic).

<sup>577</sup> Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, 48.

trails behind them. The landscape is barren—the absented fruit trees that figure in Jabra’s poem echo the absence of women, a reflection of the “rape” of Palestine that Massad highlights in his reading of the Palestinian National Charter. Ankori reads the absence of women in this painting in relation to the lost homeland and the children “as real and symbolic figures: they are the bereaved children of a dead mother, as well as the offspring of the lost Motherland.”<sup>578</sup> The painting illustrates the desperate suffering Shammout experienced and witnessed at the age of eighteen when he was forced out of his home.

The landscape in Shammout’s painting is not the same as that in Al-Ghoussein’s photograph, but a comparison generates provocative ideas about the latter’s project. Shammout depicts a landscape that at one time provided sustenance, indicating the loss of fertile land and impending destitution. Al-Ghoussein depicts the tents that litter the landscapes of historical photographs taken when Palestinians were expelled in 1948, tents that Shammout may very well have slept in (Figure 4.31). Though Al-Ghoussein never mentions the tent in his description of the series, it is difficult to deny this resonance. His reference to the notion of transience might here be applicable, for tents are not meant to be used permanently. However, refugee camps persist, and generation after generation of Palestinians are born in exile. This permanent transience is an apt description of the state of exile, in which one never feels at home, never feels a sense of belonging. And as Mourid Barghouti has described, not even return relieves the feeling.<sup>579</sup> Al-Ghoussein did not suffer the difficult life of the refugee camps, but he, along with many other Palestinians, ended up in the Gulf.<sup>580</sup> His photographs therefore not only revisit the

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>579</sup> Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, 2000.

<sup>580</sup> The history of Palestinians in Kuwait was the subject of an exhibition that opened in Kuwait in 2012. The exhibition featured commissioned objects produced by craftspeople and engaged the history of Palestinians in the country as well as conceptual strategies in contemporary art and exhibition making. The exhibition, *Museum of Manufactured Response to Absence* (MoMRtA), opened at the Museum of Modern Art in Kuwait (22 May—12 July

history of Palestinian dispossession and subsequent life in the Gulf but also contribute to the tradition of creating a body of images that illustrate this history. His contribution is not an appendage, however. He does not add to the cadre of symbols. Rather, his photographs challenge Palestinians to create new narratives that move beyond those that posit victimhood and grief.

While the tent and desert might be expected symbols of Palestinian dispossession, what figures most prominently in Al-Ghoussein's *Untitled (C Series)* is the blue tarpaulin. Jack Persekian, the director of the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit, Palestine (under construction), related it to the blue screen process, arguing that the tarp "carries the potential of being re-worked, of confusing fact with deception."<sup>581</sup> Director of Art Dubai Antonia Carver describes it as a "step towards anonymity—a kind of anti-identity art that flies in the face of the more aggrandizing kinds of 'identity art' prevalent in the late 1980s in the US and UK, and in some art from the Middle East and its diaspora today."<sup>582</sup> It is interesting that both Persekian and Carver refer to Al-Ghoussein's use of the tarp in terms of various forms of representation. While Persekian warns us that what you see is not always what you get, Carver rightly points out Al-Ghoussein's desire to move away from associations with identity art. Al-Ghoussein's wrought relationship with the notion of identity has here been established—with his American-accented Arabic, his Kuwaiti passport, his prohibition from entering his patria, and his history of living in several countries, the photographer could hardly be termed typical of any cultural or national identity category. The photographer's complicated sense of national identity, longstanding work with landscape photography, and residence in the nationally, linguistically, and culturally diverse

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2012). See Ala Younis, "Museum of Manufactured Response to Absence," accessed November 14, 2012, <http://www.alayounis.com/MoMRtA.htm>.

<sup>581</sup> Jack Persekian, "Imminent Move," in *Tarek Al-Ghoussein In Absentia*, 7.

<sup>582</sup> Carver, "TITLE" in *Tarek Al-Ghoussein In Absentia*, 81. It should be noted that both Carver and Persekian worked with Al-Ghoussein, as all three were active in the small Emirati art scene. While Persekian left his post as director of the Sharjah Art Foundation in 2011, Carver remains as the director of the art fair Art Dubai.

UAE have coalesced and culminated in *(In) Beautification*, a photographic series that approaches the relationship between landscape, museums, art and national identity.

### ***(In) Beautification: Landscaping national identity, a conclusion***

While Al-Ghoussein examines the issue of belonging and national identity through his personal experience in his early series, in *(In) Beautification* (2011) he casts a wider net to consider two intersecting ways that national identity has been read through museums and landscape. Unlike the preceding series, in which he makes a point to conceal the locations where they were produced, Al-Ghoussein makes clear that he shot *(In) Beautification* on the island of Saadiyat, a man-made island 500 meters off the coast of Abu Dhabi. I read the series using scholarship on the relationship between museums and national identity because Saadiyat is the future home of the Louvre Abu Dhabi (designed by Jean Nouvel) (Figure 4.32), the Guggenheim (Frank Gehry) (Figure 4.33), the Performing Arts Centre (Zaha Hadid) (Figure 4.34), and the Zayed National Museum (Norman Foster) (Figure 4.35), the UAE's first national museum. Landscape also relates to the nation and it manifests in two forms in Al-Ghoussein's series. One is a reading of landscape in art and literature as an ideological representation of the nation. The other concerns garden design landscape. The cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove has read both as visual manifestations of "the control and domination over space as an absolute, objective entity, its transformation into the property of individual or state."<sup>583</sup> Juxtaposed with Al-Ghoussein's examination of his own exilic identity through symbols in Palestine's historical narratives, *(In) Beautification* is an apt series to conclude this chapter.

Scholars have considered the relationship between museums and national identity, for the

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<sup>583</sup> Denis Cosgrove, "Prospect, perspective and the evolution of the landscape idea," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 10, no. 1 (1985): 46.

history of both the museum and the institution of the nation-state converged in 19th century Europe in the production of the citizen. Two aspects of this convergence are useful here. One is the production of national identity through the display of heritage, which is validated through institutional authority. The other considers a more processual aspect of museums. In Tony Bennett's "exhibitionary complex" theory, he considers the role of museums in the 19th century, arguing that through them, the modern state made "disciplinary apparatuses" visible in order to produce citizens that would self-regulate. Control is thereby interiorized through a perceived shift in position from the knowable object to the knowing subject.<sup>584</sup> In this way, museums figured significantly in the production of a controllable and conforming citizenry in 19th century Europe. In a related vein, art historian Carol Duncan reads museums as spaces in which rituals of belonging are enacted and argues that "those who are best prepared to perform its ritual...are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial, etc.) the museum ritual most fully confirms."<sup>585</sup> Additionally, as arbiters of education, museums demonstrated emerging notions of collective national identity through expressions and displays of culture. As anthropologist Richard Handler has argued, the notion of having a unique culture was integral to the development of nationalist discourse and identity.<sup>586</sup> I rely on these theories in my reading of the UAE's project of museum building, which I argue figures into the representation of Emirati national identity. Because the UAE offers a temporary yet long-term home to people from all around the world who outnumber Emirati citizens, the portrayal of national identity in its museums, particularly how it deals with

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<sup>584</sup> Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations* 4 (1988): 73-102.

<sup>585</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London: Routledge, 1995, 8. Also see the special issue of *Museum and Society* 3, no. 1 (March 2005) on museums and national identity.

<sup>586</sup> Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

this significant portion of the population, will be illuminating.<sup>587</sup>

While museums in the 19th century were tied up with the representation and definition of nation-state identities, anthropologist Sharon Macdonald shows that the institution of the museum can adapt to changing conceptions of identity that challenge the primacy of the nation-state.<sup>588</sup> Many museums have attempted to respond to such challenges by altering their approach to consider issues such as whose history is being represented, and whose is not. In the United States, ethnic communities have taken representation into their own hands through the institution of their own museums, as with the Arab American National Museum (founded in 2005, Dearborn, MI) and the Japanese American National Museum (founded in 1992, Los Angeles, CA). The Smithsonian Institution has attempted to redress exclusion through the building of museums that focus on communities disenfranchised by U.S. policies, such as the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of African American History and Culture. The AANM and JANM exemplify formations of identity that are not bounded by nation-state borders while emphasizing a more Andersonian conception of national identity. Macdonald's example of a successful instance of dealing with the prevalence of transcultural identity is set in the Transcultural Galleries at Cartwright Hall in Bradford, Britain, a city comprised of people from many countries in South Asia, Europe and the Caribbean. Informed by

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<sup>587</sup> The UAE became a nation in 1971, a process that brought together seven emirates—Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Ajman, and Umm al Qaywayn—after the discovery of oil in 1958. Previous to the development of the oil industry, sea trade and pearl diving were important sources of finance, the latter collapsing when Japan developed new technologies in pearl cultivation. A large part of the population suffered poverty and many were illiterate, generating the need for expatriates to build the newly established country when time came for the development of its infrastructure. Today, expatriates from over 160 countries comprise an estimated 80% of the country's 4 million people. Frauke Heard-Bey, "The United Arab Emirates: Statehood and Nation-Building in a Traditional Society," *Middle East Journal* 59, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 357-375. For a history of the country told through the experience of one elite family in the UAE, see Mohammed Al Fahim, *From Rags to Riches: A Story of Abu Dhabi*, London: The London Centre for Arab Studies, 1995. Owing to its significance in Emirati history, there is talk about reviving the pearl industry: Nicolas Parasie, "UAE in Pearl Industry Revival Push," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 13, 2013, accessed July 18, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/middleeast/2013/06/13/uae-in-pearl-industry-revival-push/>.

<sup>588</sup> Sharon J. Macdonald, "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities," *Museum and Society* 1, no. 1 (March 2003): 1-16.

postcolonial theory, the curator sought to highlight connections among communities through a focus on topics that interested multiple communities.

Especially because the UAE does not naturalize its citizens, such an approach to identity representation would be beneficial in Emirati museums. The UAE has always been an ethnically diverse place. With the sea and seafaring a significant part of its culture, the Emirates have historically hosted people who have passed through, sometimes for extended periods. These people came from Iran, India, Pakistan and East Africa. However, the institutionalization of belonging through nationalization transformed the ways in which people relate to home. Today, the majority of residents in the UAE do not possess citizenship, yet they still maintain a sense of belonging and affiliation, especially because many are born and live the majority of their lives in the country.<sup>589</sup> Still, the looming reality of having to return to their home country generates a sense of insecurity among expatriates. For this reason, the subject of belonging and national identity in the UAE can certainly be fraught. While the ZNM's vision indicates that the institution is a "place for all; for UAE nationals, residents and visitors," its content is based on the values held by Sheikh Zayed: education, conservation, environmental sustainability, heritage and culture, humanitarianism and faith.<sup>590</sup> The approach is logical—not only is Sheikh Zayed considered the "father of the nation," he was loved by many in the UAE, Emirati and otherwise, because he put his values in motion through gracious generosity to everyone in the country.<sup>591</sup> Following his ideology, an inclusive approach to exhibition making would be mutually

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<sup>589</sup> Residents are allowed to stay in the country as long as they have a work visa or are the dependents of a visa-holder. Marc Lavergne, "Global City, Tribal Citizenship: Dubai's Paradox," in Cities of the South: Citizenship and Exclusion in the Twenty-first Century, eds. Barbara Driessens, Franck Mermier and Heiko Wimmen (London: Saqi, 2007), 136-154.

<sup>590</sup> Zayed National Museum, "Home," accessed November 22, 2011, <http://www.zayednationalmuseum.ae/the-vision/overview.html>.

<sup>591</sup> Heard-Bey, "United Arab Emirates," 357.

beneficial to both the citizens and the expatriate community (who effectively built and continue to sustain the growth of the country).

Al-Ghoussein's exilic identity and estranged relationship to the notion of belonging offers a provocative way to consider the UAE and the issue of representing national identity via museums. Even to the exile whose life was spent moving from one country to another, he indicates that the UAE challenged his understanding of the terms "identity and culture."<sup>592</sup> This manifests in his ambiguous engagements with the landscape, what he terms "light interventions and non-invasive interactions."<sup>593</sup>

In *(In) Beautification 1947* (2011) (Figure 4.36) the camera is positioned at the bottom of a minor slope. At the top of the hill, a hydraulic excavator faces left as a construction worker stands closer to the right side of the frame, indicating that the land is in the process of being prepared for another purpose. Dressed in black, Al-Ghoussein stands further down the slope on a platform, next to which is a potted plant, an indication of future landscaping plans. With his back to the camera, he faces the horizon line as though in an act of witness. The ground, a mix of orange, light grey, and dark grey sand, is tracked with tire marks, trailing up and down the hill in an indication of a great deal of activity. The photograph depicts the process by which space becomes place, the former described by cultural geographer Stephen Daniels as "the dynamics of becoming" and the latter "the stability of being."<sup>594</sup> Al-Ghoussein references this transformation in his description of the series: "the images explore how constructed landscapes reflect struggles

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<sup>592</sup> Madeline Yale, "Stephen Shore and Tarek Al-Ghoussein with Madeline Yale," *spot* (Houston Center for Photography magazine) (Spring 2012): 24.

<sup>593</sup> American University of Sharjah, "Strong AUS participation at Emirati Expressions 2," October 18, 2011, accessed July 18, 2013,

[http://www.aus.edu/news/article/82/strong\\_aus\\_participation\\_at\\_emirati\\_expressions\\_2#.UehxrWT71ug](http://www.aus.edu/news/article/82/strong_aus_participation_at_emirati_expressions_2#.UehxrWT71ug).

<sup>594</sup> Stephen Daniels, "Place and the Geographical Imagination," *Geography* 77, no. 4 (October 1992): 314.

to forge an identity.”<sup>595</sup>

In highlighting *construction* of the landscape, (*In*) *Beautification 1947* disrupts the smooth signifying relationship between landscapes and national identity that Daniels describes:

National identities are co-ordinated, often largely defined, by ‘legends and landscapes,’ by stories of golden ages, enduring traditions, heroic deeds and dramatic destinies located in ancient or promised home-lands with hallowed sites and scenery. The symbolic activation of time and space, often drawing on religious sentiment, gives shape to the ‘imagined community’ of the nation. Landscapes, whether focusing on single monuments or framing stretches of scenery, provide visible shape; they picture the nation.<sup>596</sup>

Al-Ghoussein’s photograph, indeed, the whole series presents landscapes that are not ancient but also not-quite-built. There is no religion here, no heroism, no “golden deeds.” Instead the photograph depicts an empty space preparing for architectural, cultural, horticultural, and human habitation. Al-Ghoussein could have depicted local architectural traditions, such as the coral brick structures that fill Sharjah’s “Heritage Area” or the striking sand dunes that comprise the Western Region of the UAE. But the country’s “authentic” heritage is not what concerns him.<sup>597</sup> Rather, what resonates with Al-Ghoussein is the self-conscious development of the UAE’s

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<sup>595</sup> American University of Sharjah, “Strong AUS participation.” While it is unclear if the plants, trees, and grasses depicted in the photographs are indigenous, Al-Ghoussein’s statement suggests they are not. However, the cultivation of and education about indigenous plants is currently in discussion in the UAE. See Caline Malek, “Project to save native plants to start soon,” *The National*, June 13, 2011, accessed July 18, 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/project-to-save-native-plants-to-start-soon>.

<sup>596</sup> Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 5. For further readings of national identity through representations of its landscapes, see Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris), 2011; Triscia Cusack, *Riverscapes and National Identities* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010); Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, 2nd ed. (Madison, WI and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

<sup>597</sup> In relation to local or “indigenous” heritage in the UAE, a major developer in Sharjah, Shurooq, is in the midst of undergoing a massive urban project. A major highlight of the project will occur on Bank Street, named for the bank buildings that once dominated the street but are in the process of relocating. Shurooq is planning to build so-called “heritage” buildings, made of coral bricks, to return the area back to the state it was in previous to the “modern” buildings that are now seen as old and falling apart. While many of the buildings were occupied by banks, some were residential. Nonetheless they will be leveled in the process of returning Sharjah back to its past. Ironically, these heritage buildings will not be residential, but touristic, with spas and hotels dotting the street. Similar to Dubai’s Madinat Jumeirah, a tourist destination complete with restaurants, hotels, and shops in which to purchase goods deemed ethnic, Bank Street will strive to attract tourists through a cultural construction. See Shurooq, “Heart of Sharjah,” accessed July 28, 2013, <http://shurooq.gov.ae/en/project/our-developments/heart-of-sharjah.html>. This redevelopment was the topic of a conference called “Failed Architecture” comprised of local architects held at Maraya Art Centre in Sharjah on April 23-26, 2014.

national identity via museum building, for it allows him to reveal the constructed nature of national narratives and identity. In this way, his series echoes literature scholar Elizabeth Helsinger's study, which strips bare the assumption of a natural and timeless Englishness and reveals both its construction and shifting meanings in visual and literary depictions of the landscape.<sup>598</sup> Through the use of landscape photography, Al-Ghoussein visually disrupts the notion of an enduring national identity.

But the figure does not merely stand by and watch. He also participates and sometimes even disrupts design plans. In *(In) Beautification 2385* (2011) (Figure 4.37), the sloping landscape is comprised of swaths—light blue sky, orange sand, a stripe of carefully bordered light grey, orange again, dark grey landscape rocks, white plastic, and finally another strip of light grey. Al-Ghoussein stands at right with one foot in the orange sand and the other in the rocks tossing stones into the sand. Some have already been thrown, while four are caught in mid-air. There is something of the absurd about the photograph, for it is clear that his singular motions will not make much of an impact in comparison to the machinery and manpower it took to organize the land as such. It is not altogether clear that he is necessarily trying to disrupt the carefully planned yet painterly sections of the landscape. Perhaps he is simply asserting his right to participate in the production of the landscape—the national identity—for his actions highlight the labor required to shape and manicure the land. Indeed, in photographs such as *(In) Beautification 0225* (2011) (Figure 4.38), he waters newly planted grass in a landscape that is so transformed, nothing of its local associations remain. This is a concern for Al-Ghoussein, for he

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<sup>598</sup> Elizabeth K. Helsinger, *Rural Scenes and National Representation: Britain, 1815-1850* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). She is careful to signal that the presence of nostalgia often obscures histories of rapid change that stem from uneven power relations, imperialism in particular. *Ibid.*, 4-5.

indicates that the landscapes on Saadiyat lack the “indigenous horticultural elements that are particular to and serve to define a place.”<sup>599</sup>

While the series does indeed integrate the project of museum building and landscape representations into a consideration of national identity, Al-Ghoussein’s mention of indignity shuttles the series beyond the realm of horticulture and institution-building. In *(In) Beautification 1713*, the figure lies among the edges of ivy growing on the sandy earth. In the background, a corrugated metal fence spans the horizon with houses and a haze-covered construction site behind it. The figure occupies a relatively full patch of ivy, and his feet extend among the vines of the plant. The photograph is a good example of what Al-Ghoussein refers to with his mention of the abandonment of “indigenous horticultural elements,” for the non-native ivy proliferates quickly and can be difficult to eradicate once established. Embedding himself among the growth that threatens to overtake the indigenous sand of the UAE, the exile seems to suggest his collusion in the process. In the UAE, this is a sensitive subject, for its “locals” make up only 20% of the population. The rest come from almost everywhere else, making it one of the most culturally, nationally, and linguistically diverse places in the world. While this reality may to some be one to praise and encourage, it has a different impact on Emiratis who, according to historian Frauke Heard-Bey, have come together as “an undisputed class of the privileged few. In the face of the overwhelming presence of expatriates, all the genuine ‘locals’ perceive themselves now first and foremost as UAE citizens.”<sup>600</sup> I do not necessarily read the photograph

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<sup>599</sup> American University of Sharjah, “Strong AUS participation.” Al-Ghoussein’s statement may also reflect current concerns about the cultivation of and education about indigenous plants in the UAE. See Caline Malek, “Project to save native plants to start soon,” *The National*, June 13, 2011, accessed July 18, 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/project-to-save-native-plants-to-start-soon>. Also see University of Sharjah, “Seed Bank and Herbarium Research Laboratory,” accessed May 8, 2014, <http://www.sharjah.ac.ae/en/research/specialunits/sciences/seedbank/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>600</sup> Heard-Bey, “United Arab Emirates,” 361. The author goes on to write “despite various social strata, the local population all feel strong national solidarity, and accordingly have their very own set of behavior towards each

as an attempt to threaten Emirati agency and indigeneity but rather as Al-Ghoussein's self identification as a man who can only be an outsider. Juxtaposed with the weed-like ivy, he illustrates his position as perennial and suggests the prevalence and predominance of this position in the UAE and beyond. But while the photograph aligns Al-Ghoussein with the invasive ivy, it can also be read as a danger to him, for just as it can take over the desert, so can it cover and suffocate him. Here the question of belonging, both its possibility and impossibility, is presented as a burden and a threat. The photograph highlights the difficult notion of association, which for some is taken for granted but for others is a privilege that only history may confer.

Al-Ghoussein's decision to produce his series on Saadiyat Island reveals the contradictions inherent in ideas such as "local," "indigenous," "identity," and "nationality." While his may be a critique of the decision to build a Louvre and Guggenheim, "foreign" museums, rather than embark on a process of education and museum building from within the Emirates, his perennial experience as a foreigner throws this critique into question. This aspect of his biography is a significant driving force behind his practice, which I read through the various references to art history, both western and Palestinian. In Al-Ghoussein's practice of self representation, I show how the photographer subjects the presentation of his exilic identity, which emerges through his use of symbols loaded with reference to the Palestinian experience in his *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)*, to critical practices that confound the relationship between representation and identity. I also show how his performances of national identity are void of the masculine trappings typically found in the project of nationalism. Third, I read a later body of work, *(In)Beautification*, in relationship to the notion of belonging. Staged on Saadiyat, an island that will host world-class museums in Abu Dhabi, I read the series in two ways. The first contends that museums are a

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other." She uses the example of how an Emirati deals with another during a traffic infraction as opposed to how s/he deals with an expatriate.

ritual space through which citizens enact their belonging. In the context of the United Arab Emirates, a country dominated by foreigners, it remains to be seen how his population will be represented in the museums on Saadiyat. The second considers representations of the landscape in art as a representation of the nation. In these photographs, Al-Ghoussein engages in actions that, though minimal, reveal his concerns with issues such as exclusion, indigeneity, and belonging as they relate to national identity.

Once construction of the Louvre, Guggenheim, Performing Arts Center and ZNM museums has been completed, the landscape of Saadiyat will be dominated by their impressive architectural structures. For this reason, I read the island as a meta-museum. What then can be said for the ways in which Saadiyat represents national identity in the United Arab Emirates? The country did not look to more traditional symbols such as desert landscapes or coral brick buildings to represent itself. Rather, by employing starchitects and investing huge sums of money, it portrays the country as one with wealth and power. Perhaps unintentionally, however, by situating these national symbols on a man-made island, it also emphasizes the constructed nature of national identity. It is therefore the perfect location for Al-Ghoussein's photographic practice and his complicated relationship to the land of Palestine. Simultaneously estranged and obsessed, the solitary figure roams, asserting his presence through quiet acts. The ambiguity that emerges reflects Edward Said's comment on the exile who "jealously insists on his...right to refuse to belong."<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Exile," in Reflections on Exile and Other Essays (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 182.

## CHAPTER 5

### Walid Raad

“Art can be defined as a believable lie.”<sup>602</sup>  
John Baldessari

The internationally acclaimed Lebanese artist Walid Raad first came on the contemporary art scene with *The Atlas Group* (dates vary), a fictional organization of his creation, the purpose of which is to produce and preserve documents about the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) in an archive. One of these documents, a series of inkjet prints called *Let's be honest, the weather helped* (2006) (Figure 5.1, Figure 5.2, Figure 5.3, Figure 5.4, Figure 5.5, Figure 5.6, Figure 5.7), is a multimedia collage of sorts in which Raad overlaid black-and-white photographs of buildings and scenes in Beirut upon pages in a book of diagrams. He contextualizes the work within his own experience living in Beirut during the war in a narrative:

Like many around me in Beirut in the 1980's, I collected bullets and shrapnel. I would run out to the streets after a night or day of shelling to remove bullets from walls, cars and trees. I kept detailed notes of where I found every bullet by photographing the sites of my findings, and by placing colored dots over the bullet holes in my black and white photographs. The color of the dots corresponded to the mesmerizing hues I found on the bullets' tips. The colors were also faithful to the distinct code devised by manufacturers in different countries to mark their cartridges and shells. Over the years, and to complement my collection, I purchased bullets from vendors on the streets, seeking out the entire spectrum of colors that adorned the tips of the 7.62 x 43 mm. cartridge used in AK-47s or of the 5.45 x 45 mm. cartridge used in M-16s. It took me 25 years to realize that my notebooks had all along catalogued the 23 countries that had armed or sold

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<sup>602</sup> Sidra Stich, “Conceptual Alchemy: A Conversation with John Baldessari,” *American Art* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 63.

ammunitions to the various militias and armies fighting the Lebanese wars, including the U.S., U.K., Saudi Arabia, Israel, France, Switzerland, and China.”<sup>603</sup>

The narrative, which I read as part of the artwork, reveals a number of issues. Alongside its autobiographical nature, it reveals Raad’s childhood impulse to collect and categorize the war, an impulse reflected in Raad’s use of the archive to frame his project. Perhaps more obviously, it also alludes to the war’s convoluted nature through reference to the many parties involved. Rather than elucidate this aspect of the civil war, Raad’s approach to representing these sociological and political issues is to aestheticize destruction and trauma: he places dots of lemon yellow, neon green, magenta, blues, reds, and oranges of different hues on building facades and even trees, transforming images of partially destroyed structures into exciting visual displays. The images are striking in the juxtaposition of simple line drawings and muted tone of the photographs against dots whose colors clearly point to Raad’s anachronistic use of graphic design programs. And because each formal decision was based on a pre-existing condition (the bullet hole location, the color of the bullet tip, the manufacturers’ coding system), the work presents Raad not so much as an artist but a chronicler who translates three-dimensional reality into a two-dimensional representation.

Despite what seems an abundance of both textual and visual information, Raad leaves out an integral bit: his reference to the world-renowned American artist John Baldessari (b. 1931). Baldessari has become a significant force in contemporary art for his wry interrogation of the nature of art through the use of found images and text. *Let’s be honest, the weather helped* most obviously references Baldessari’s practice of affixing colored dots onto the faces of figures in found images as in *Studio* (1988) (Figure 5.8), a practice the artist initially began in order to delete the overabundance of smiling faces in found photographs. Baldessari devised a system of

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<sup>603</sup> Walid Raad, “The Atlas Group Archive,” accessed May 11, 2010, <http://www.theatlasgroup.org/data/TypeA.html>.

color-coding in which red would reference danger and green freedom, for example, which also assists with viewer comprehension.<sup>604</sup> In doing so, Baldessari restructures the relationships among the figures, thereby drawing attention to the ways in which meaning is made.<sup>605</sup> The dots also force the viewer to abandon reliance on facial expression and construct narratives through consideration of other clues, such as body language and actions. The process highlights Baldessari's interest in language, which Raad shares, for in both projects, the colors and their significations comprise a semiotic system. However, their work also reveals the possible failures of language, for color is susceptible to shades, variation, and, importantly, connotation.

Because color evokes emotional responses, some of Raad's prints elicit unexpected responses. *Let's be honest, the weather helped (Egypt)* (Figure 5.5) is particularly exemplary of this. In it, a building is nearly obscured by dots of several different yellows, indicating a tremendous firefight, massive destruction, and likely death. Yet because yellow connotes brightness and sunshine, the viewer is wedged between two incongruous systems of meaning, whereby one communicates death and destruction, while the other offers a much happier tone. I begin this chapter on Walid Raad with an emphasis on the artist's reliance on John Baldessari, an art world heavyweight whose experiments with text and photography inspired subsequent generations. As will be clear in this chapter, Raad engages formal and conceptual strategies described by Baldessari when he said, "for most of us photography stands for the truth but a good artist can make a harder truth by manipulating forms."<sup>606</sup> Throughout this chapter, I read Walid Raad's work by following the trail of his art historical references. I limit my discussion to

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<sup>604</sup> Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, "God Knows: The Prints of John Baldessari," in John Baldessari: A Print Retrospective from the Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation (Portland, OR: Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation; San Francisco: Fine Art Museums of San Francisco; New York: Distributed by D.A.P., 2010), 14.

<sup>605</sup> Baldessari discusses this process in an interview. See Stich, "Conceptual Alchemy," 70.

<sup>606</sup> Quoted in Coosje van Bruggen, John Baldessari (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1990), 214.

particular works from both of his projects to date, *The Atlas Group* and *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World* (2007-present) (from here on *Scratching on Things*).

In *The Atlas Group*—a collection of photographs, videos, and multimedia works organized in the form of an archive—Raad examines the Lebanese civil war through the crafting of fictional narratives and characters to consider how repressed trauma manifests in collective memory. He positions the artworks as archival documents, thereby lending them an air of authority through their association with official history. His strategy of integrating fiction into his wartime narratives puts concepts like truth, fact, and objectivity in question. In 2004, he described the work of *The Atlas Group*, indicating that “we are trying to find those stories that people tend to believe, [that] acquire their attention in a fundamental way, even if they have nothing to do with what really happened.” He continues:

Traditional history tends to concentrate on what really happened, as if it’s out there in the world, and it tends to be the history of conscious events. Most people’s experience of these events...is predominately unconscious and concentrates on facts, objects, experiences, and feelings that leave traces and should be collected.<sup>607</sup>

Following Raad’s lead, critics, art historians, and writers have read Raad’s strategies through what Middle East scholar Sune Haugbølle and others have described as a repression of the sixteen-year war in collective memory.<sup>608</sup> Raad is one among a loosely associated group of artists known as the postwar generation, and much of their work engages with the relationship between the war and collective memory. Another prominent reading of *The Atlas Group* was encapsulated

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<sup>607</sup> Quoted in Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “Profile: Walid Raad: The Atlas Group Opens its Archives,” *Bidoun* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 18.

<sup>608</sup> Sune Haugbølle, “Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 1, 2005: 192-193. Also see Samir Kassir, “Ahwal al-dhakhirah fi lubnan” (“The Conditions for Memory in Lebanon”), in *Mémoire pour l’avenir*, ed. Amal Makarem (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 2000), 195-200; Sune Haugbølle, *War and Memory in Lebanon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Craig Larkin, *Memory and Conflict in Lebanon: Remembering and Forgetting the Past* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012).

by art historian T.J. Demos, who describes the postwar generation's tendency to create "representations where the evidentiary mode of photography or video becomes indissociable from imaginary scenarios."<sup>609</sup> In other words, *The Atlas Group* plays off the belief that photography and video, because of their indexical relationship to that which is depicted, portray the truth. A linking of these two readings well describes Raad's approach, in which he puts photography's potential capacity to record and present reality at work in the project of interrogating the notion of objective historical truth.<sup>610</sup> However, if as art historian Sarah Rogers argues, such approaches refrain "from endowing aesthetic practice with agency in defining [the Beirut art scene]," Raad's second project clearly indicates his engagement with this work.<sup>611</sup>

In *Scratching on Things*, Raad turns to a wholly different topic, the burgeoning art scene across the Middle East. While *The Atlas Group* takes the form of the archive, *Scratching on Things* is structured like a book, at least conceptually. Its constituent parts are referred to as the preface, chapters, plates, appendices, and the index. As with his first project, much of the work is available online, where Raad clearly lays out his concerns:

In 2007, I initiated an art project about the history of art in the Arab world. My project leans on the recent emergence of large new infrastructures for the visual arts in the Arab world. These developments, when viewed alongside the geo-political, economic, social and military conflicts that consumed the region in the past few decades, shape a rich yet thorny ground for creative work. The artworks and stories I present with this project were

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<sup>609</sup> Sandra Dagher, Catherine David, Rasha Salti, and Christine Tohme, with T.J. Demos, "Curating Beirut: A Conversation on the Politics of Representation," *Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 102. Also see Rogers, "Postwar Art," 52-54.

<sup>610</sup> Dina Al-Kassim, "Crisis of the Unseen: Unearthing the Political Aesthetics of Hysteria in the Archaeology and Arts of the New Beirut," *Parachute* 108 (October 2002): 146-163; Alan Gilbert, "Walid Raad," *Bomb*, no. 81 (Fall 2002): 38-45; Andria Hickey, "Conflict Studies: Andria Hickey discusses how Walid Ra'ad's Atlas Group uses fiction to help us understand facts in Lebanon," *C Magazine* (Winter 2007): 18-23; Mark Jarzombek, "The Post-traumatic Turn and the Art of Walid Ra'ad and Krzysztof Wodiczko: From Theory to Trope and Beyond," in *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, eds. Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg (Hanover, NH and London: Dartmouth College Press and University Press of New England), 2006, 249-271.

<sup>611</sup> Sarah Rogers, "Out of History: Postwar Art in Beirut," *Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 17.

shaped by encounters on this ground with individuals, institutions, economies, concepts and forms.<sup>612</sup>

Aptly, the statement echoes the concerns of this dissertation, and Raad tackles it from the perspective of a conceptual artist whose “encounters” with “art in the Arab world” are considerable in number. He is therefore well positioned to comment on the situation. However, in true form, rather than offer a straightforward representation of his point of view, which I read as wary of these developments, he employs conceptual strategies that refer to several topics simultaneously, thereby creating a body of work that entails the telling of multiple stories. At first glance, the project seems to have little in common with *The Atlas Group* except, perhaps, the typically fanciful stories he spawns to accompany the visual portion of his work. However, there is a connection between the two projects that illustrates Raad’s approach to self-representation, which he produces by integrating autobiography, Lebanese history, and art history.

In a 2008 interview I conducted with Raad, the artist casually mentioned that the historian Dr. Fadl Fakhouri, the supposedly fictional protagonist in *The Atlas Group*, was “rumored” to be his father.<sup>613</sup> This information made sense, for some of his work, in particular the video *Missing Lebanese Wars* (1996), which I examine at great length in this chapter, possessed an air of familial intimacy that stemmed from his use of family snapshots, which I suspected were Raad’s.<sup>614</sup> Yet, Raad’s statement was not an offering up of reliable information;

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<sup>612</sup> The artworks that comprise *Scratching on Things* are available online. See Walid Raad, “Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World,” accessed July 30, 2013, <http://www.scratchingonthings.com/>.

<sup>613</sup> Walid Raad, interview by author, New York, NY, April 25, 2008.

<sup>614</sup> *Missing Lebanese Wars* (in three parts) was originally produced in 1996 and later incorporated into a 17-minute video called *The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs* (1999). *Dead Weight* starts with *Missing Lebanese Wars*, followed by *Secrets in the Open Sea* (a 6-minute single channel video originally produced in 1996) and finally, *Miraculous Beginnings* (in two parts) (1998, 4 minutes, Single Channel Video). In this dissertation I focus on *Missing Lebanese Wars* because of Raad’s engagement with the project of self-representation. I first viewed *The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs* at the Video Data Bank (Chicago, Illinois) on March 7, 2008. From here on, I refer to *Missing Lebanese Wars* (in three parts) simply as *Missing Lebanese Wars*.

he was simply passing on a rumor. While rumor is seen as unreliable, the historian Luise White uses rumors to write histories of the colonial period in eastern and southern Africa. However, she does not do so by positing rumors as the source for alternative histories. Rather, she indicates that rumor prompts historians to ask different questions, thereby changing “the way a historical reconstruction is done.”<sup>615</sup> How does Raad’s use of rumor function? I came to believe that Raad was using me as a conduit through which his rumor might take shape in my writing, that he planted the rumor in order to point to a heretofore unexplored dimension of his work—an autobiographical one—or so I thought.<sup>616</sup>

Yet as *Scratching on Things* began to take shape, I came to realize that Raad saw me in terms of what he describes as “the increased visibility of the makers, sponsors, consumers and histories of ‘Arab art.’”<sup>617</sup> In this lies a connection between *The Atlas Group* and *Scratching on Things*, a practice of self-representation and an institutional critique, respectively. Curator Achim Borchardt-Hume similarly connects the two projects, arguing that Raad’s use of the grid and serial arrangement in installations of *The Atlas Group* works refer to conceptual art’s interrogation of “the ideological workings of the gallery space.”<sup>618</sup> Borchardt-Hume’s statement is a reference to Brian O’Doherty’s argument that the white cube directs the ways in which artworks are read, an argument with which I open Chapter Two of this dissertation. My discussion of Raad’s reference to Baldessari in *Let’s be honest, the weather helped* points to a

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<sup>615</sup> Luise White, *Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>616</sup> I was apparently not Raad’s first try, for the rumor was also mentioned in Fereshteh Daftari, *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking*, with an essay by Homi Bhabha and prose by Orhan Pamuk (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 22.

<sup>617</sup> At the time, I was among a small handful of scholars in the field at the time. Others included Anneka Lensen (MIT), Nikoo Paydar (Courtauld Institute of Art), Sarah Rogers (MIT), and Dina Ramadan (Columbia University). Raad’s quote is taken from Raad, “Scratching on Things.”

<sup>618</sup> Achim Borchardt-Hume, “Walid Raad: Symptoms of Withdrawal,” *Cura*, no. 10 (Winter 2012): 86-99. Also see Hélène Chouteau-Matikian, “The Need for Profanation,” in *Miraculous Beginnings*, eds. Achim Borchardt-Hume and Cassandra Needham (Whitechapel: London, 2010), 134-135.

concurrence with Borchardt-Hume's analysis. However, in arguing that *The Atlas Group* is also a practice of self-portraiture, I push Borchardt-Hume's argument further. By reading *The Atlas Group* as a self-portrait, I situate the project within a post-1960s history of the genre, which Anne Collins Goodyear indicated had transformed with the dominance of mechanically reproducible media.<sup>619</sup> Her argument traces the history of self-portraits, beginning with its function as an autograph in the 15th century, which lessened in force with the advent of photography, the mechanical properties of which challenged the notion of the artwork's aura. The artwork's value, she argues, is relocated from the artist to the audience, an argument she makes as she leans on Marcel Duchamp's preoccupation with preserving his art historical relevance, which he saw as resting in the hands of the audience, and Roland Barthes' thesis of the death of the author.<sup>620</sup> Most intriguing in this chapter is the challenge that inherently reproducible media, a mode prevalent in Raad's practice, makes to the notion of authenticity and truth. Following, I do not read Raad's suggestions of autobiography as revelations of his experience in the civil war. Rather, I argue that he culls strategies from the annals of art, particularly those that critique processes of institutionalization throughout its modern history. I posit that he does so in order to comment on the ways in which non-EuroAmerican artists have been situated in the art world through a performance of their identity, which I argue is a similar form of institutionalization.

Raad's curriculum vitae further underpins my argument, for it indicates his theoretical savvy in the discipline of art history and beyond. When Raad came to the United States from Lebanon in 1983, he began his university studies in biology at Boston University, but quickly changed to photography. From the Rochester Institute of Technology, he received his Bachelor's

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<sup>619</sup> Anne Collins Goodyear, "Repetition as Reputation," 13-26.

<sup>620</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author." I discuss Duchamp's relationship to self-portraiture later in the chapter.

of Art in 1989 in Fine Arts, with a focus on photography. He received a Master's in Cultural and Visual Studies in 1993 at the University of Rochester and then a Ph.D. from the same department in 1996.<sup>621</sup> Today he is Associate Professor of Art at the Cooper Union School of Art in New York, where he teaches a range of courses on photography, video, and theory. He is a founding board member of the Arab Image Foundation, a non-profit organization whose mission is to “collect, preserve and study photographs from the Middle East, North Africa and Arab diaspora.”<sup>622</sup> He is associated with the Lebanese curator Christine Tohme and Ashkal Alwan, the Beirut arts association she co-founded in 1994 and directs.<sup>623</sup> Raad is the recipient of several awards, including the Hasselblad Award (2011) and the Alpert Award (presented by CalArts, 2007) and numerous fellowships, most recently the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (New York, 2009). He has had solo exhibitions at the Musée du Louvre (Paris, 2013), Documenta (13) (Kassel, 2012), Whitechapel Gallery (London, 2010), REDCAT (Los Angeles, 2009), Reina Sofia (Madrid, 2009), and the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, 2007).<sup>624</sup> Among his group exhibitions are the 2000 and 2002 Whitney Biennale, Documenta XI

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<sup>621</sup> His doctoral dissertation is an interdisciplinary work that engages the fields of Middle Eastern history, postcolonial, queer, and cultural studies in an examination of the “images and texts produced about the western hostages who were kidnapped and held in Lebanon between 1985 and 1991.” See Walid Raad, “Beirut...(à la folie): A Cultural Analysis of the Abduction of Westerners in Lebanon in the 1980s,” (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 1996).

<sup>622</sup> Arab Image Foundation, “About,” accessed December 9, 2013, <http://www.fai.org.lb/Template.aspx?id=1>. Many of the photographs in the collection are digitized and searchable by keyword, photographer name, place, genre, studio, and collection, providing a great resource for researchers. Raad and fellow Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari put together an exhibition drawing from the AIF archives called *Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography*. The exhibition examined the function of photography in the 20th century in the Middle East through four lenses: identity photographs, the Middle Eastern tradition of *photo surprise*, itinerant photography, and institutional group photos. It was held at Grey Gallery in New York University and ran from January 11 to April 2, 2005. See Grey Art Gallery, “Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography,” accessed December 9, 2013, <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart/exhibits/mapping/mappinghome.htm>.

<sup>623</sup> Ashkal Alwan hosts exhibitions and festivals but also seminars, video screenings, workshops, forums, artist talks and a publicly accessible library that particularly focuses on cultural practices in Lebanon. It has become an important center for the arts in Lebanon and beyond. ArtReview listed Tohme in their “Power 100” in 2010, 2011 and 2013. See Ashkal Alwan, “Home,” accessed December 9, 2013, <http://ashkalalwan.org/>. See ArtReview, “Christine Tohme,” accessed December 9, 2013, [http://artreview.com/power\\_100/christine\\_tohme/](http://artreview.com/power_100/christine_tohme/).

<sup>624</sup> Raad's most updated CV is available at Walid Raad, “Walid Raad,” accessed May 7, 2014, [http://www.paulacoopergallery.com/static/0000/6637/WR\\_Bio\\_-\\_NEWEST\\_version.pdf](http://www.paulacoopergallery.com/static/0000/6637/WR_Bio_-_NEWEST_version.pdf).

(2002), and Sharjah Biennial (2010). His works are included in several private collections as well as museums including the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim (NY), the British Museum, Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou (Paris), and Darat al Funun (Amman, Jordan). He is represented by Paula Cooper Gallery in New York, Anthony Reynolds Gallery in London, and Sfeir-Semler Gallery (Beirut and Hamburg).

The chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first, I examine an *Atlas Group* work, the three-part video *Missing Lebanese Wars* (1996), reading Raad's rumors through his references to art history to argue that it is a form of self-portraiture. This process necessarily delves into events that predate his birth, for they set the stage for the political realities he lived through as a young boy in Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War. The process I use juxtaposes Raad's self-representations alongside his art historical appropriations, for I argue that he uses these artworks, the contexts in which they were created, as well as their critical reception to inform and illustrate the stories he tells about his own history. I turn to *Scratching on Things* in the second section. Here my goal is to trace Raad's critique of the recent developments of art in the Arab world. Rather than offer a direct or obvious critique, Raad's is generally coy. I juxtapose *Scratching on Things* with another kind of work that Raad does, which is to use his weight as a sought after contemporary artist to effect change in labor practices in the Gulf, in particular the Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi.

## **The Atlas Group**

### *The archive's function*

Walid Raad emerged on the contemporary art scene with his project *The Atlas Group*. Under the guise of this fictional foundation, he set out "to research and document the

contemporary history of Lebanon.” The statement is found on the homepage of *The Atlas Group* website. It continues:

One of our aims with this project is to locate, preserve, study and produce audio, visual, literary and other artifacts that shed light on the contemporary history of Lebanon. In this endeavor, we produced and found several documents including notebooks, films, videos, photographs and other objects. Moreover, we organized these works in an archive, The Atlas Group Archive. The project’s public forms include mixed-media installations, single channel screenings, visual and literary essays, and lectures/performances.<sup>625</sup>

*The Atlas Group* deals particularly with the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), a brutal series of convoluted conflicts bred from an asymmetrical political system that derived from policies of the French, who had a mandate on Lebanon with the dissolution of the Ottoman empire in 1918 until independence in 1943. Upon independence, leaders of the Christian Maronite and Sunni Muslim communities verbally agreed on the National Pact of 1943, in which government positions would be filled according to proportions of the population. It was agreed that the presidency would be filled by a Maronite, the Prime Minister would be a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament would be a Shia Muslim. The rest of the positions would be assigned according to a political system called confessionalism, which is based upon a community’s proportion of the population.<sup>626</sup> To some extent and for a period, the system worked to keep order in Lebanon. However, the association of government positions with religious affiliation eventually led to the leaking of regional politics into national affairs (generally, Muslims were interested in allying with other Arab nations while Christians favored the west).<sup>627</sup> The Israel/Palestine conflict also

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<sup>625</sup> Artworks that comprise *The Atlas Group* are available online. See Walid Raad, “The Atlas Group Archive,” accessed May 11, 2010, <http://www.theatlasgroup.org/index.html>.

<sup>626</sup> Maurus Reinkowski and Sofia Saadeh, “A Nation Divided: Lebanese Confessionalism,” in *Citizenship and Ethnic Conflict: Challenging the Nation State*, ed. Haldun Güralp (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 99-116.

<sup>627</sup> On this, the journalist Samir Kassir wrote that “no matter how lethally effective communal division may have been, it can hardly account for the war in Lebanon by itself: at no moment did it appear in its pure form; it was constantly refracted and distorted through the lenses of other, more far-reaching conflicts...Beirut, and the country of which it was the capital, were at one and the same time the site of conflicts between left and right, between Israelis and Arabs, among Arabs themselves, between the United States and the Soviet Union, and, last but not least,

impacted Lebanon's politics. With the Nakba in 1948, approximately 100,000 Palestinians fled to Lebanon; and with the defeat of the PLO in Jordan in 1970, the resistance relocated to Lebanon.<sup>628</sup> The presence of Palestinian refugees and fighters increased the existing sectarian tension.

The civil war was therefore fought by several parties, including Maronite, Sunni, Shia, and Druze Lebanese alongside several foreign parties, which included the PLO, Israel, and Syria, and peacekeeping forces comprised of several other nations. In 1989, an Arab League appointed committee comprised of delegates from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and Morocco drafted the Ta'if Agreement (named after the Saudi Arabian city in which the committee met), resulting in a slow but eventual ceasefire and an even split in government posts between Muslims and Christians, even while allowing Syria to maintain a prominent position in Lebanese affairs. While widespread fighting ended with the seizure of Beirut by the Syrian army in October 1990, it took years for the militias to disarm, the economy to stabilize and state institutions to become relatively restored, resulting in the sense among Lebanese that they were still living a war.<sup>629</sup> The Syrian military remained until withdrawal in 2005 with the assassination of prime minister Rafik Hariri and the ensuing revolution.<sup>630</sup>

Coupled with widespread long-term post-traumatic stress disorder, a "culture of amnesia" enveloped Lebanon. Haugbølle describes why:

Lebanese civil society itself has shown structural resistance to public memory, even if certain components have been more willing than others to look at the past. Thus for a long time, legal, political, and sociopsychological factors combined to create a situation

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between the 'Great Satan' embodied by the United States and its scarcely less demonized counterpart, 'Islamic terrorism.'" Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, foreword by Robert Fisk (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 19-20.

<sup>628</sup> Simon Haddad, *The Palestinian Impasse in Lebanon: The Politics of Refugee Integration* (Brighton, England; Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2003).

<sup>629</sup> Sune Haugbølle, "Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 1 (2005): 192.

<sup>630</sup> For a discussion of Syrian control in Lebanon, see Rola El-Husseini, *Pax Syriana* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012).

where the memory was at the same time taboo and predicament; while the results of the war were evidently influencing politics and society, the memory of it was not publicly debated.<sup>631</sup>

The issue of truth in this context is wrought, for as Haugbølle writes, those involved in some of the war's most devastating atrocities were given amnesty after the war, thereby keeping their government posts and eventually assuming responsibility for the reconstruction of Beirut.<sup>632</sup> To deal with "the events," as the war is euphemistically referred to, would require the trial of politicians who continued to wield power. As such, while the impact of the war was undeniably present in the ruined lives and ruins of Beirut, the people of Lebanon had no public forum through which to heal from the traumas brought on by its brutal violence.

The first attempt at this took place in the mid-1990s, when a loosely connected group of artists referred to as the postwar generation—Raad among them—took up issues wrought by the civil war.<sup>633</sup> Several studied in the United States and examine the subject of history and its representation from disciplinary and theoretically savvy vantage points that delve into art history, visual cultural, architecture, journalism, media studies and the visual arts.<sup>634</sup> Sarah Rogers argues, the prevalence of the archival aesthetic among postwar generation artists links their work "with global neo-conceptual projects and an allegorical approach to history [that engages]

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<sup>631</sup> Haugbølle, "Public and Private Memory," 193.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-193.

<sup>633</sup> Sandra Dagher, Catherine David, Rasha Salti, and Christine Tohme, with T.J. Demos, "Curating Beirut," 100. Sarah Rogers argues against the typical characterization of the postwar generation's emergence from "a historical eclipse created by the civil war" and instead shows how they form part of a long history of Lebanese cosmopolitanism. See Rogers, "Postwar art."

<sup>634</sup> For example, Walid Sadek studied visual art at Long Beach California Community College and earned a Master's degree from Claremont College. Ziad Abillama, Bernard Khoury, and Lamia Joreige studied at Rhode Island School for Design. Akram Zaatari earned a Master's at the New School University in New York. And as mentioned earlier, Raad obtained his doctoral degree from the University of Rochester. Other postwar generation artists include Tony Chakar, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Lamia Joreige, Bilal Khbeiz, Rabih Mroue, Lina Saneh, and Jalal Toufic.

postmodernism's disillusion with grand narratives," an assessment clearly applicable to Raad's strategies.<sup>635</sup>

Despite the messiness that is inherent to personal histories, or perhaps because of it, Raad neatly organizes the documents that make up *The Atlas Group*, employing a clean aesthetic, tone and tenor that imitates a real archive (Figure 5.9).<sup>636</sup> The index page categorizes the contents of the archive according to authorship: Type A are documents attributed to "imaginary individuals or organizations," Type FD files are documents attributed to "anonymous individuals or organizations," and Type AGP documents are attributed to *The Atlas Group*. Mimicking physical file folders, hyperlinks lead to each type of document, which when clicked, lead to flowcharts that include images of the documents. Raad began presenting *The Atlas Group* archives in 2000 in performance/lectures, claiming he was a founding member. The persona he donned for his performances employed a seriousness that mirrors the aesthetic of the website. With a monotone voice, he proceeded to tell the stories and planted audience members with scripted questions in order to generate conversations about the war. After presenting these lectures for over two years, his approach grew less effective because audiences expected his play with fact and fiction, which began to overshadow his attempt to start conversations about the war. Indeed, critic Kaelen Wilson-Goldie wrote that "Raad rallies art to read and respond to politics."<sup>637</sup> Raad revealed that *The Atlas Group* and its protagonists are fictional in 2003, a move that allowed him to finally put

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<sup>635</sup> Rogers, "Postwar art", 15. Scholars and curators have taken note of the prevalent use of the archive in contemporary art more generally. Okwui Enwezor curated an exhibition called "Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art" (International Center of Photography, New York, NY, January 18-May 4, 2008). See Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography; Göttingen: Steidl Publishers, 2008). Also see Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: MIT Press, 2008); Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 3-22.

<sup>636</sup> Walid Raad, "The Atlas Group Archive," accessed May 11, 2010, <http://www.theatlasgroup.org/index.html>.

<sup>637</sup> Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Generation Gap," *The National*, July 18, 2008, 5.

to rest attempts to determine between the real and the fabricated in *The Atlas Group* archives.<sup>638</sup> Poet and art critic Alan Gilbert writes that “the fictional nature of *The Atlas Group* is gradually revealed at the same time that Raad’s role as official spokesperson and artist is both undermined and reframed” as the lecture unfolds.<sup>639</sup> Raad explained this reframing a year later when he indicated that his formal decisions “are informed by some of the modes of display and conventions of address that tend to connote a certain cultural authority and hence clear a space to present an alternative story.”<sup>640</sup> Still, audiences took the content of his lectures as truth. As artist John Menick tells it, “a fiction can still be convincing, even if from the beginning one knows it is false.”<sup>641</sup>

While Raad frames *The Atlas Group* as a project that considers the Lebanese civil wars and the purview of national history, much of the work focuses on personal lives, including his own. In light of Raad’s rumor that Fakhouri is his father, Raad produces a self-representation that, because of his blend of fact and fiction, simultaneously works to confound the possibility that audiences may learn something about him. To complicate things further, with Raad’s use of the archive, the personal stories obtain the same weight as official history. Further, reading Raad’s use of the archive through anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s writings, Raad’s works

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<sup>638</sup> Ibid. He began producing work under his own name in 2005.

<sup>639</sup> Alan Gilbert, “Walid Raad (Re)invents the Archive,” *Aperture* no. 198 (February 2010): 63.

<sup>640</sup> Walid Raad, “The Loudest Muttering is Over: Documents from The Atlas Group Archive,” (lecture at the Art Institute of Chicago, February 25, 2004).

<sup>641</sup> John Menick, “Imagined Testimonies: An Interview with Walid Raad,” New York, March 25, 2002, accessed May 11, 2010, <http://www.johnmenick.com/writing/imagined-testimonies-an-interview-with-walid-Raad>. In an interview with Alan Gilbert, Raad stated, “I also always mention in exhibitions and lectures that The Atlas Group documents are ones that I produced and that I attribute to various imaginary individuals. But even this direct statement fails, in many instances, to make evident for readers or an audience the imaginary nature of The Atlas Group and its documents. This confirms to me the weighty associations with authority and authenticity of certain modes of address (the lecture, the conference) and display (the white walls of a museum or gallery, vinyl text, the picture frame), modes that I choose to lean on and play with at the same time.” Alan Gilbert, “Walid Raad,” *Bomb*, no. 81 (Fall 2002): 40.

become imbued with a sense of the sacred. For Appadurai, archival documents are seen as such because they are animated by the “spirit of ‘pastness.’”<sup>642</sup> He indicates that since

no real understanding exists about this deep sacrality of the past, the archive is usually sacralized as the site of the past of some sort of cultural collectivity (often the nation), which is seen as sacred by definition.<sup>643</sup>

Appadurai additionally writes that the “purity of the accidents that produced the traces,” traces being the documents that comprise the archive, imbue them with “moral authority.”<sup>644</sup> The documents Raad produces are therefore similarly imbued with sacrality, which works to heighten the belief that the documents are authentic. Yet when Raad reveals the fictional nature of his work, he challenges that authority, whether moral, cultural, historical, or otherwise. Therefore, while the documents that make up *The Atlas Group* archive seem to hold the key to the past, they stymie this hope with the threat of withholding.

The notion that *The Atlas Group* documents are not wholly forthcoming about the past which they purport to describe relates to the traumatic nature of the Lebanese civil war, for trauma has a tendency to burrow itself compactly, neatly before it manifests in some unrecognizable form. The impact of trauma makes its way into Raad’s art via his reading of Sigmund Freud, in particular the notion of hysteria. Raad indicates that “in Freud’s analysis of hysteria, when a subject undergoes a traumatic experience, what they come to believe has been has little to do with what actually happened to them.” He goes on:

But what they come to believe is certainly related to fantasies that are based on memories and that those fantasies are very important. You can’t just dismiss them and tell them, wake up, these are just fantasies. The fantasy captures the subject’s imagination and is his or her reality. So those are called hysterical symptoms. The hysterical symptoms bear no resemblance and have no real proximity to the event that caused them, and that’s what fascinated Freud...And I think the hysterical symptom then becomes, in a way, a

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<sup>642</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Archive and Aspiration,” in *Information is Alive*, eds. Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder (Rotterdam: V2\_Publishing/NAI Publishers, 2003), 15.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid.

document of something. And the interesting thing about it is that it's not a question of returning to the origin, it's a question of the future. It's a question of the production of a narrative that rings true to the subject...The story you tell yourself may have nothing to do with what happened to you, but that's the story that may cure you.<sup>645</sup>

*The Atlas Group* archives are filled with hysterical symptoms cum documents that stem from trauma. However, this is not Raad's revisionist history of the war. It is something altogether different.

Raad's work follows in the postmodern tradition that challenges the notion of a grand truth, thereby making room for multiple and sometimes competing truths.<sup>646</sup> As anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes, "history means both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts, both 'what happened' and 'that which is said to have happened.'"<sup>647</sup> In referencing moments in photographic history, in particular those that focus on the indexical nature of photography, Raad emphasizes the slippery relationship between the event and its representation. He plays with and against the notion that material objects, both photographs and other archival documents, possess traces of history and may therefore unlock historical mysteries or provide exhaustive access to the experience of a particular situation or event.<sup>648</sup> The detailed yet elusive narratives he conjures entice the curious to seriously pursue each turn of the maze, only to find herself at the entrance to yet another maze for, as art historian and comparative literature scholar

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<sup>645</sup> Walid Raad quoted in Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Profile: Walid Raad," 25. Sarah Rogers links psychoanalysis to Raad's grounding of "the act of memory in narration, rather than in physical objects (statues, monuments, buildings)." Sarah Rogers, "Forging History, Performing Memory," *Parachute* 108 (October 2002): 76.

<sup>646</sup> This concept was most famously put forth by Jean-François Lyotard, who argued that grand narratives, or metanarratives, should be replaced by numerous local narratives. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984).

<sup>647</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>648</sup> Ernst Bloch's treatise on the trace and history was written between 1910 and 1929. For a philosophy of the trace, see Ernst Bloch, *Traces*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar (Stanford University Press, 2006).

Sven Spieker has asserted, “archives do not record experience so much as its absence.”<sup>649</sup> In this way, Raad’s narratives/fantasies/hysterical symptoms, which may or may not have foundation in truth, resonate with archives. Art historian Hal Foster’s description of archival art and its practitioners is applicable here: Raad’s work is “concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces...these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects—in art and in history alike—that might offer points of departure again.”<sup>650</sup>

*Missing Lebanese Wars (in three parts)*

*Missing Lebanese Wars (in three parts)* (1996) is a video about Dr. Fadl Fakhouri, a main protagonist in *The Atlas Group* archive, who is described as the “foremost historian of the Lebanese wars.” The three-part video examines three subjects simultaneously, two of which are not wholly apparent and figure as subtext. The most apparent are the three narrated stories: one about the gambling habits of a group of historians during the war, another about Fakhouri’s separation from his wife Zainab, and a third about Fakhouri’s last days. When read through the lens of Raad’s rumor that he is the historian’s son, the references to him that appear in the video—photographs of three children and an anecdote about his collection of bullets gathered during the war—can be seen as the artist’s self-representations (albeit enunciated in the third person). However, these representations are confounding because Raad never directly claims them as his own. It is only with Raad’s rumor, spread several years after the video’s production, that the representations become associated with Raad. This oblique form of self-representation is the second subject that manifests in the video. The third subject in the video is photography, and following the video’s division into three parts, the subject is examined in three ways. First, Raad

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<sup>649</sup> Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: MIT Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>650</sup> Foster, “Archival Impulse,” 5.

references Eadweard Muybridge's use of photography in his attempt to understand human and animal locomotion. Second, he puts forth the esoteric notion that, like photographs, objects might possess the capacity to bear witness. Third, he engages with Roland Barthes' often referenced reminiscence of his mother in photographs after she died. These three examinations seem to inflect one another, resulting in a process that reflects on the fragile relationship between events and their representation, as well as the possibility that there is something to be deciphered on the margins of straightforward representations.

### *History's wagers*

Raad begins *Missing Lebanese Wars* with a story about historians of the Lebanese civil war, who would spend their Sundays betting on horse races. Raad himself narrates the story:

It's a little known fact that the major Lebanese historians of the recent Civil War were compulsive gamblers during the war period. It is said that they met every Sunday at the track, Marxists and Islamists betting on races one through four, Maronite nationalists and socialists betting on races five through eight.

Every Sunday, this group of historians arrived early to the track and proceeded, race after race, to stand behind the official race photographer, whose task was to image the winning horse as it crossed the finish line. It was also said that that the historians managed to convince, some say bribe, the photographer to snap only one picture of the winning horse as it arrived. The historians placed their bets on whether the photograph... The historians placed their bets on whether the photograph, the photo finish, as it was published the next day in the newspaper *Al-Nahar*, represented the before, after or the horse's actual crossing of the finish line.<sup>651</sup>

Though the context in which this anecdote is set, the Lebanese civil war, is undeniably *there*, the video shies from an overt discussion about it. This may be a reference to Lebanon's national school curriculum, in which national history stops at 1946. The committee of historians charged with writing the history of the civil war arrived at an impasse when they were unable to produce

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<sup>651</sup> Walid Raad, *The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs*, 1999, Single Channel Video.

a narrative on which each of the factions could agree.<sup>652</sup> In light of this history of history-writing, in which political consensus overrode the work of educating the populace, Raad highlights the act of representation, thereby prioritizing it over the event itself. But this does not mean that Raad instead gives us unimpeded access to the gambling historians. In fact, we never see the historians either standing “behind the official race photographer” or “bribing” the photographer to take only one picture of the horse crossing the finish line. What we do see in the video is a series of quick shots of spectators at the track, followed by a sequenced juxtaposition of photographs of the horse at the finish line taken from the newspaper *Al-Nahar*. Rather than serve up information, quick fades and partial close-ups preserve Raad’s oblique representation of the horse races.

In this first vignette of *Missing Lebanese Wars*, Raad references Eadweard Muybridge’s stop-action photographs of a galloping horse, which he produced for Leland Stanford in 1878 (Figure 5.10 and Figure 5.11).<sup>653</sup> By capturing fractions of a second, photography allowed visual access to what the naked eye could never see on its own, therefore finally putting to rest the question as to whether, in the midst of a gallop, all four of the horse’s hooves lift off the ground.<sup>654</sup> The corresponding images in Raad’s video (Figure 5.12, Figure 5.13, Figure 5.14) are not exact replicas of Muybridge—his appropriations never are—but their resemblance is undeniable. They are both black and white, and in some cases, both are overlaid with color; they

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<sup>652</sup> Oren Barak, “Don’t Mention the War? The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetfulness in Postwar Lebanon,” *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 63-65.

<sup>653</sup> I want to thank Toby Millman for pointing out the relationship between *Missing Lebanese Wars* and Eadweard Muybridge. I located one other mention of this correspondence in Stefanie Baumann, “Archiver ce qui aurait pu avoir lieu: Walid Raad et les archives de l’Atlas Group,” *Conserveries Mémoires* 6 (2009): 16, [online journal], accessed April 29, 2010, <http://cm.revues.org/381>. For Muybridge, see Marta Braun, *Eadweard Muybridge*, London: Reaktion Books, 2010.

<sup>654</sup> To provide this evidence, Muybridge placed cameras 14 inches apart and connected electric relays that triggered the shutters when the horse passed it, thereby producing photographs according to the horse’s speed. For a discussion of this experiment, written eleven years after, as well as his other motion studies, see Ray E. Lankester, “The Muybridge Photographs,” *Nature* 40, no. 1023 (June 6, 1889): 78-80.

are photographed laterally; lines in the background of both are used for measurement; both clearly illustrate that which they set out to prove: in the case of Muybridge, the horse does lift off the ground in the midst of a gallop, and in the case of Raad, the photograph depicts “the before, after or the horse’s actual crossing of the finish line.” Aesthetically, Raad’s use of image stills in his video references another of Muybridge’s innovative image-based works, the zoopraxiscope. With this invention, successive images are either printed or hand drawn onto a rotating glass disk, which, when spun, gives the impression of moving images. Raad refers to the zoopraxiscope by incorporating its jumpiness, a look he achieves through video editing.

Another reference to Muybridge turns out to be a hoax. Legend had it that Stanford hired Muybridge to produce the photographs in order to settle a bet. While this story has since been refuted, it points to the belief that photography represents incontrovertible truth.<sup>655</sup> A fan of rumors, Raad’s video references this story by giving betting a prominent place in his narrative. Betting plays an important part in horse races, but in Raad’s hands, the nature of the bet becomes convoluted. Rather than bet on which horse will win, their wagers displace the significance of winning in favor of a focus on the moment of its depiction. What becomes significant is not the end goal (winning), but its near-misses. In a discussion of the video’s title, art historian Kassandra Nakas asserts that “missing” “implies the central ‘miss’ immanent to the discipline of history, namely the impossibility of representing history and recapturing lived experience... War and violence are always and solely present as abstractions.”<sup>656</sup> The historians, each representing a warring religious or political group in the civil war, here regularly come together to place friendly wagers, ostensibly “missing” the war raging outside the track. While Nakas is correct in

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<sup>655</sup> This story has been refuted by the historian Phillip Prodger. See Phillip Prodger, Time Stands Still: Muybridge and the Instantaneous Photography Movement (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>656</sup> Kassandra Nakas, “Double Miss. On the Use of Photography in The Atlas Group Archive” in The Atlas Group (1989-2004): A Project by Walid Raad, eds. Kassandra Nakas and Britta Schmitz, (Köln, Germany: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2006), 51.

pointing out the fraught aspects of the relationship between photographic representation and war, she misses Raad's engagement with the historiography of photography. By referencing one of its early practitioners, one whose research and experimentation with motion studies continues to find relevance among contemporary practitioners, Raad brings the history of photography together with the history of the civil war. His juxtaposition of two modes of representation, history writing and photography, suggests parallels, in particular the authority both are seen to possess. Raad's video, however, indicates that, like photography, the pages that comprise history are just as malleable in their relationship to truth. This is particularly highlighted by the revelation (by historians!) that Stanford's bet was but a rumor.

### *The stories that objects tell*

Part two of *Missing Lebanese Wars* begins with a somber oboe solo by the famed Lebanese musician Marcel Khalife's opera "Ghina'iyat Ahmad Al Arabi."<sup>657</sup> Against this background, a man and woman narrate a story about Zainab Fakhouri—Dr. Fadl Fakhouri's wife, and in light of Raad's rumor, his mother. We are told that Zainab left her husband in 1981, six years into the sixteen-year-long war.<sup>658</sup> The man and woman who narrate explain:

In 1981, during the Civil War, Zainab Fakhouri left her husband. She took from the home she shared with her family seventeen objects, objects that had traveled with her from Palestine to Jordan in '47, Jordan to Lebanon in '67, Lebanon to Sierra Leone in '69 and

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<sup>657</sup> Marcel Khalife's Arab nationalist songs often used famed Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's poems as the lyrics. Exiled for ten years, Darwish wrote poetry that has made him a cultural icon and the voice of Palestinians. He also played a central role in drafting the 1988 Declaration of Palestinian independence. Raad's use of Khalife's music points to the intertwined histories in the region, which manifest in his own family, as his mother is Palestinian and his father Lebanese. In an interview with the Israeli poet Helit Yeshurun, Darwish reveals the impact exile has had on him, in particular the simultaneous desire and repulsion to represent his people. See Helit Yeshurun, "'Exile is So Strong Within Me, I May Bring it to the Land': A Landmark 1996 Interview with Mahmoud Darwish," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 1 (Autumn 2012): 46-70. Rashid Khalidi wrote an extended obituary that outlines the extent to which Darwish contributed to the production of "the Palestinian national imagination." See Rashid Khalidi, "Remembering Mahmud Darwish," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38, no. 1: (Autumn 2008): 75.

<sup>658</sup> This story reflects Raad's story. Caroline Jones reports that Raad's parents "chose to separate" during the Civil War. See Caroline A. Jones, "Doubt Fear," *Art Papers* 29 no. 1 (January/February 2005): 30.

back to Lebanon in '71. Of the seventeen objects, six were also chosen because they appeared in photographs produced on the very day Zainab Fakhouri left or was forced to leave Birzeit, Beirut, Amman and Freetown.<sup>659</sup>

The images that accompany the video narration are the photographs that inspired Zainab's six choices. They are family snapshots that depict ordinary moments—two little girls posing with an older man next to a Christmas tree (Figure 5.15), a boy on his birthday surrounded by mothers, aunties and grandmothers gesticulating energetically (Figure 5.16), a couple seated on a couch (Figure 5.17)—nothing one might expect to see on the day a woman “left or was forced to leave” her country. The textual narrative and photographs in the video comprise a circular logic, in which the story serves as evidence: the objects in the photos are the proof that the photos were taken on the day Zainab left or was forced to leave. Viewers have no choice but to accept the terms of the story: the photos and, as I will argue, the objects obliquely document a series of ruptures in Zainab's life. The dates and places mentioned in the narration suggest the following biography: Zainab is a Palestinian from Birzeit who, as did many on the eve of the declaration of the state of Israel, went to Jordan in 1947 with the plan of returning when things calmed down. When the situation failed to allow for her return, she (again, like many Palestinians) stayed in Amman. In 1967, the year of the Six Day War (in which Jordan was involved), she went to Lebanon. Her move to Sierra Leone in 1969 may be a reference to the large Lebanese population in West Africa, many of whom move between home and this diasporic location.<sup>660</sup> In 1971, she returned to Lebanon where she presumably stayed. Ten years later and in the middle of a terrible war, she left her husband, taking with her the objects that marked these moments of displacement.

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<sup>659</sup> Walid Raad, *The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs*, 1999, Single Channel Video.

<sup>660</sup> Lebanese people began migrating to Sierra Leone in the mid-19th century. See Neil Owen Leighton, “Lebanese Emigration: Its Effect on the Political Economy of Sierra Leone,” in *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, eds. Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris, 1992).

This history of Zainab's is yet another story that emerges from the forest of Raad's subterfuge. The vignette points to his mother's traumas and may even suggest that Raad inherited them. These traumas stem from both personal experiences, such as Zainab and Dr. Fakhouri's separation, as well as the collective experiences of war, occupation, displacement, and exile. But while the narrative explains the wheres and whens of her departures, the photographs Raad chooses to illustrate them, peaceful images of the domestic lives of an apparently middle class family, speak nothing of these experiences.<sup>661</sup> Marianne Hirsch uses family snapshots to consider the ways in which they shape personal and cultural memory of the Holocaust. In her discussion of a photograph that depicts a survivor, she writes "there is nothing *in the picture* that indicates its connection to the Holocaust."<sup>662</sup> Still, the photograph carries the possibility that a story about the Holocaust can be told, Hirsch suggests, by the knowing viewer. Armed with knowledge of history, background and context, the viewer fills in information that cannot be gleaned in the picture itself.

The photographs in Raad's video ask the viewer to similarly imagine the stories associated with 1947, 1967, 1969, 1971, and 1981. Their ordinariness belies the tragedies that Raad refuses to represent. Additionally, though he has no memory of the Palestinian exodus of 1948 (he was not born), he has postmemory of the Nakba. Postmemory is a term that Hirsch coined to describe memories of the Holocaust harbored by the children of survivors. "Postmemory," she writes, "is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from

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<sup>661</sup> For studies on the often incommensurable relationship between word and image, see Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Visual and Verbal Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Mieke Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>662</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 19.

history by deep personal connection.”<sup>663</sup> Studies about Palestinians born into the post-Nakba generations have shown that a similar relationship exists. Though they did not live through the expulsion, they have a tight grip on the idea of, and the desire to return to, a place they know only through visual representation and oral histories.<sup>664</sup> Hirsch’s analysis is applicable to Raad’s postmemory of his mother’s experiences, in particular because both focus on the role photographs play in the construction of postmemory.

Raad’s postmemory of Zainab’s trauma does not reside solely in photographs, for the vignette suggests that *objects* are similarly evocative of these histories. Such a notion stems from his own childhood experience: when his parents separated, the objects his mother took with her when she left felt to him “extraordinarily redolent, even Proustian.”<sup>665</sup> This reference to Marcel Proust suggests that the objects triggered involuntary memories for Raad. Proust coined the term “involuntary memory” to describe a memory that arises from a sensory experience rather than an intellectual process.<sup>666</sup> By associating the objects with photography, a technology that rests on an indexical relationship between the object and the film (“six were also chosen because they appeared in photographs produced on the very day Zainab Fakhouri left or was forced to leave Birzeit, Beirut, Amman and Freetown”), Raad suggests that they might similarly bear indexical traces of Zainab’s departures.

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<sup>663</sup> Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 22.

<sup>664</sup> For example, see Victoria Mason, “Children of the ‘Idea of Palestine’”; Juliane Hammer, *Palestinians Born in Exile*; Susan Slyomovics, *The Object of Memory*.

<sup>665</sup> Raad explained this to Caroline Jones during a 29 December 2003 interview. See Jones, “Doubt Fear,” 35, footnote #6.

<sup>666</sup> Marcel Proust wrote about the smell of dunking a Madeline cookie into tea and its visceral triggering of memories: “But at the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening inside me...And suddenly the memory appeared.” Proust uses this experience to begin the seven-volume story, which he published between 1913 and 1927. See Marcel Proust, *Swann’s Way: In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 1, ed. Christopher Prendergast, ed., tran. with an introduction by Lydia Davis (London: Penguin, 2004), 48-51.

Yet some of the memories that Zainab's objects refer to are of events that predated his birth in 1967. In other words, they conjure Raad's postmemory of the events. *Missing Lebanese Wars* demonstrates the extent to which his postmemory is mediated through layers of representation and recollection: his mother's memory of the event is passed on to Raad through stories, these stories are "represented" by her objects, these objects are photographed, and finally they are incorporated into a video produced decades after the events. While the levels of mediation suggest a seemingly insurmountable distance between Raad and his mother's displacements, they do not diminish its significance and effect. As Hirsch argues,

postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation... Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated.<sup>667</sup>

Raad's "imaginative investment and creation" of his mother's history evidences the difficulty of representing the hefty weight of historical, collective, and personal loss, as well as the pain that goes hand in hand with such loss. However, his approach is more than autobiographical, for he engages with the historiography of photography, dipping in and out of the stories that have come to shape our understanding of a medium that today dominates modes of representation. In this way, while he does not shy away from self-representation, autobiography, and the question of identity, he redirects the identity-obsessed gaze towards an experimental engagement with photography and representation. In particular, he suggests that there exists more than one way to represent an event, turning to objects such as candle stick holders, clocks, and vases: objects that were either present or photographed on those fateful days. Like Zainab, therefore, they too lay claim to displacement and a life in exile.

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<sup>667</sup> Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 22.

Media theorist Laura U. Marks suggests that videos such as Raad's, what she terms "intercultural cinema," "excavate the traces left by things that 'emigrate' due to...global flows of capital, power, and desire."<sup>668</sup> Intercultural cinema presents multisensorial images, which "call upon memories of the senses in order to represent the experiences of people living in diaspora."<sup>669</sup> She refers to filmic images of objects that evoke buried histories such as those in *Missing Lebanese Wars* as "recollection-objects" following philosopher Gilles Deleuze's writings on post World War II cinema.<sup>670</sup> Deleuze describes the "recollection-image" in film as one that brings forth the past, even though it exists on the plane of the present. Marks describes a recollection-image as one that

embodies the traces of an event whose representation has been buried, but it cannot represent the event itself. Through attentive recognition, it may provoke an imaginative reconstruction, such as a flashback, that pulls it back into understandable causal relationships.<sup>671</sup>

Philosopher Henri Bergson described the concept of "attentive recognition" as a process that recreates "not only the object perceived, but also the ever-widening systems with which it may be bound up."<sup>672</sup> In other words, when a person sees an object, they make sense of it by considering representations of it. Conceived in this way, recollection-images stimulate a process

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<sup>668</sup> Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 78. Marks defines intercultural cinema as that made by people living in the United States, Canada and the UK as a result of the "global flows of immigration, exile and diaspora." Marks, *Skin of the Film*, 1. Marks and Raad completed their doctoral studies at the University of Rochester and graduated together in 1996. The affinities between Raad's video and Marks' book are therefore not accidental. Not only did Marks construct her argument about recollection-objects in part by using Raad's work (as I will show later) but Raad also read drafts of her manuscript, as indicated in the acknowledgements of *The Skin of the Film* (which was based on her dissertation of the same name). In 1996, the year that Raad produced the video, Marks published an article, which would comprise part of her chapter on recollection-objects. See Laura U. Marks, "Transnational objects: commodities in postcolonial displacement," *Parachute* 81 (January-March 1996): 14-19. She also uses his work to advance her theory of recollection objects. See Marks, *Skin of the Film*, 107-110.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, xi. Marks relies on Bergson's theory that memory is embodied in the senses. See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone, 1988).

<sup>670</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

<sup>671</sup> Marks, *Skin of the Film*, 50.

<sup>672</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 48.

of perception that engages so-called official representations (in media, for example) alongside the private and unofficial, such as memory. Marks' reference to Deleuze's writings on the filmic representations of time and Bergson's concept of *durée*, which is based upon a person experiencing the passage of time, offers her the vocabulary with which to consider how intercultural cinema deals with the issue of representing buried histories.

Marks refers to the recollection-object as a kind of recollection-image that encodes personal history as well as intercultural displacement.<sup>673</sup> She incorporates anthropological theories of the fetish into her definition of the recollection-object, arguing that both obtain power “not by *representing* that which is powerful but through *contact* with it.”<sup>674</sup> In this way, the fetish and the photograph share in common an indexical relationship with the object that gives their significance.<sup>675</sup> In Marks' reading of *Missing Lebanese Wars*, she identifies Zainab's objects as recollection-objects and argues that they possess traces of her intercultural displacements.<sup>676</sup> Raad uses successive close-ups (Figure 5.18, Figure 5.19, Figure 5.20) that ultimately isolate the object, a strategy that emphasizes what Marks refers to as its “witnessing quality.”<sup>677</sup> In this way, Raad's recollection-objects are similar to Roland Barthes' indication that photographs demonstrate “that has been.” Barthes claims this because of the physical relationship between the photograph and its object: the photograph offers incontrovertible evidence that it existed at the moment the photo was produced. He takes this notion further to describe the relationship between the photographed and the person looking at the photo:

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid., 85. Italics in the original. Here Marks relies on William Pietz' three part study on the fetish. See William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I,” *Res* 9 (Spring 1985): 5-17; William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, II,” *Res* 13 (Spring 1987): 23-45. William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa,” *Res* 16 (Autumn 1988): 105-124.

<sup>675</sup> Following Marks, here I focus on the anthropological definition of the fetish. For a psychoanalytical discussion of the relationship between photography and the fetish, see Christian Metz, “Photography and Fetish,” *October* 34 (Autumn 1985): 81-90.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid., 108-109.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid., 82.

the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here...A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.<sup>678</sup>

In a similar process, Zainab and Raad are connected via Marks' reading of Raad's recollection-objects, heightened by Raad's postmemory of Zainab's displacements.

### *Mourning the father*

Part three of *Missing Lebanese Wars* similarly suggests that objects possess traces of the past. The objects in question here are a collection of bullets that Dr. Fakhouri's son gathered during the civil war (which are also featured in *Let's be honest, the weather helped*). With an *oud* playing in the background, we learn that

After his wife left him in 1981, and the horse race gambling expeditions were revealed, Dr. Fakhouri retired from public life and sought refuge in his mountain mansion. One of his nurses revealed after his death, that the historian never left his bedroom, and that he'd spent his days listening to his own lectures and rearranging one of his son's bullet collections...and rearranging one of his son's bullet collections, as he repeated to himself...as he repeated to himself, the impact of a bullet is never proportionate to its physical dimensions.<sup>679</sup>

The video starts with a cropped photograph of Zainab and Dr. Fakhouri taken during happier times (Figure 5.21), then cuts to footage used in the vignette about the historians and their gambling habits, and then to a simple bedroom (Figure 5.22). It is here where Dr. Fakhouri spent his last days listening to recordings of his lectures and sorting his son's bullet collection. The audio is a jumble comprised of music, narration, and the historian's lectures. It contrasts with the visual quietude captured by the camera's pan of a wood-paneled bedroom filled with soft, natural light. The video cuts to a shot of thirteen bullets of different sizes lined up on a coral-colored

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<sup>678</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 80-81.

<sup>679</sup> Walid Raad, *The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs*, 1999, Single Channel Video.

blanket (Figure 5.23). Dr. Fakhouri's hand reaches in and begins to arrange the bullets "as though," Marks writes, "the right combination would make sense of his past," signaling the end of the video.<sup>680</sup>

Elegiac in tone, there is a subtext here, a subtext that again links the objects to photography. It is hinted at by a moment in the video when the camera lingers for a few seconds on the bed and window (Figure 5.24). The image has aesthetic affinities to Daniel Boudinet's *Polaroid* (1979) (Figure 5.25), a photograph printed on the inside cover of Barthes' important book *Camera Lucida*. Some obvious details diverge between Boudinet's photograph and the image that Raad produces in his video. In the former, the photograph is suffused with a blue-green cast by the curtains hanging in front of the window. The interior is minimally lit by light entering through a chink between the two curtains, only slightly revealing the adjacent bed and pillow. In contrast, there is an abundance of light in the room in Raad's, albeit ill-captured with the incorrect aperture setting, thereby referencing the anti-aesthetic approach of conceptual art. Not only is the view through the window washed out, but the bed is also cast in a minor darkness that is associated with technical mistakes often seen in amateur photography and video. Despite the differences in color and lighting, the similarities shared by the two images—the arrangement and spatial relationship between bed and window, the window's obscured view—are undeniable, pushing me to argue for an implicit connection between the video and the book.

But what is the significance of this connection? In producing an *implicit* reference, Raad seems to take inspiration from Barthes. Despite the prominence of the Boudinet photograph on the frontispiece, Barthes never mentions it in the text. Diana Knight, a scholar of French literature, has read the Boudinet in relation to another elusive photograph in *Camera Lucida*, the

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<sup>680</sup> Marks, *Skin of the Film*, 109.

Winter Garden Photograph, to which Barthes devotes the second half of his book, but does not print. The Winter Garden Photograph depicts Barthes' mother as a five-year-old along with her brother on a bridge in a glassed-in conservatory, the *chambre claire*, at the house where she was born. For Barthes, the photograph most truly presented her essence. He declared the photograph was "indeed essential, it achieved for me, utopically, *the impossible science of the unique being*."<sup>681</sup> Knight considers the Boudinet and the Winter Garden Photograph in tandem and argues that

Boudinet's labyrinthine dawn polaroid is surely an integral part of Barthes' symbolic narrative of rediscovering his mother in the *chambre claire* of a glass conservatory.<sup>682</sup>

*Polaroid*, Knight explains, is part of a series called *Fragments of a Labyrinth*, which Boudinet photographed in his apartment between dusk and dawn using only the light that penetrated the window, a series Barthes had seen while writing *Camera Lucida*.<sup>683</sup> Barthes alludes to the series title when he writes, "all the world's photographs formed a Labyrinth. I knew that at the center of this Labyrinth I would find nothing but this sole picture," the Winter Garden Photograph.<sup>684</sup> Part two of *Camera Lucida* is an extended reading of the photograph, a process Barthes engages to get at the bottom of the essence of photography. Whereas in part one he considered the more banal aspects of photography (it is an index of the depicted subject—"that-has-been"—or that photography represents the subject's likeness<sup>685</sup>), he turned in part two with another lens: "what we romantically call love and death."<sup>686</sup> Barthes uses the term "air," which he confesses is a "word, lacking anything better, for the expression of truth," to describe the Winter Garden

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<sup>681</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 71.

<sup>682</sup> Diana Knight, *Barthes and Utopia: Space, Travel, Writing*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 267.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*, 266-267.

<sup>684</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 73.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>686</sup> Barthes writes that "something like an essence of the Photograph floated in this particular picture. I therefore decided to 'derive' all Photography (its 'nature') from the only photograph which assuredly existed for me, and to take it somehow as a guide for my last investigation." *Ibid.*, 73.

Photograph, in which “the being I love, whom I have loved, is not separated from itself: at last it coincides.”<sup>687</sup> The Winter Garden Photograph depicts “the truth of the face I had loved.”<sup>688</sup> In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes puts his finger on the essence of photography, a tool that also helps him mourn the recent passing of his mother.<sup>689</sup>

Another aspect Knight uses to argue that the Boudinet and the Winter Garden Photograph are linked is Barthes’ description of his mother’s eyes in photographs: “a quite physical luminosity, the photographic trace of a color, the blue-green of her pupils.”<sup>690</sup> This color is echoed in Boudinet’s photograph, the only one reproduced in color in *Camera Lucida*. Additionally, Knight highlights Barthes’ emphasis on the theme of light, in particular dawn, which recurs throughout his consideration of the Winter Garden Photograph. It appears in his description of Schumann’s first *Dawn Song* (from *Gesänge der Frühe*) as music that is “in perfect harmony both with my mother’s being and with my sorrow at her death.”<sup>691</sup> But as Knight argues, he also refers to the dawn more implicitly via Proust, who similarly wrote about the death of his beloved grandmother and the tremendous sense of loss that ensued. Proust writes about how his “grandmother’s true face” came to him in an involuntary memory, an incident that Barthes relates to his recognition of his mother in the Winter Garden Photograph.<sup>692</sup> Knight completes the Proust reference for the unknowing reader, indicating that as dawn breaks, Proust

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>689</sup> Geoffrey Batchen writes that the invitation by *Les cahiers du cinema* to write a book on photography gave Barthes the opportunity to express the confluence of the three topics that had been preoccupying him: photography, remembrance, and death. See Geoffrey Batchen, “Palinode: An Introduction to *Photography Degree Zero*,” in *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes’ Camera Lucida* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>690</sup> Barthes, 66. Beryl Schlossman also makes the connection between the Boudinet photograph and Barthes’ mother as she reads the maternal body in the curtains of the photograph. See Beryl Schlossman, “The Descent of Orpheus: On Reading Barthes and Proust,” in *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 149.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid., 70. Knight indicates that in other contexts, Barthes fixates on Schumann’s references to daybreak but also relates the composer to the intimacy shared between a mother and a child.” See Knight, *Barthes and Utopia*, 267-268.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

sees his grandmother “as in one of those apparitions that had already visited me, but only in my sleep.”<sup>693</sup> Dawn is also the time when Boudinet produced his photography. Thus dawn comes to provide Barthes with a metaphor with which to illustrate his experience of love and loss. Using the metaphor of light (which also figures in photography), Barthes finds a way to bridge the seemingly incommensurable gap between music, photography, and experience, all of which rest in the luminosity of his mother’s eyes.<sup>694</sup>

Because of Raad’s reference to Barthes through his appropriation of Boudinet’s photograph, I argue that *Missing Lebanese Wars* is an expression of Raad mourning the passing of his rumored father. While Barthes’ rediscovery of his mother through her photograph helped him find “the truth of the face [he] had loved,” the process also led him to correlate photography with death.<sup>695</sup> He wrote, for example, that the punctum in historical photographs is “a defeat of Time...*that* is dead and *that* is going to die.”<sup>696</sup> The subject of death features in Raad’s video, as well, most obviously in reference to the dead historian. Indeed, a morose feeling pervades the telling of the story about Fakhouri’s last days spent alone in his bedroom reminiscing about an irretrievable past. The accompanying video footage, shots of an un-peopled yet apparently lovingly kept bedroom, highlights the loneliness he must have felt. As a historian of the Lebanese civil war, it is fitting that he spent his days arranging the bullets his son collected during those difficult years. While the narration seems to suggest the father’s mourning of a no longer present son, Raad employs strategies that suggest the transposition of father and son,

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<sup>693</sup> Proust, quoted in Knight, *Barthes and Utopia*, 261. The apparition turns out to be Proust’s mother. Knight’s text is much more elaborate. She argues that Barthes references Proust in order to “subsume[s] homosexuality into a symbolic projection of an all-embracing maternal space” as a way to pay homage to what she suggests is Barthes’ mother’s acceptance of his homosexuality. See *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>694</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 66.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*, 96. On page 97 he states that “it is because each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death that each one...challenges each of us, one by one.” Additionally, soon after the book was published, Barthes was hit by a van and died a month later. As Batchen indicates, readings of the book have been indelibly colored by this eerie twist of fate. Batchen, “Palinode,” 14.

which again harkens back to Barthes, who took on the role of caretaker for his mother in her old age. He wrote, “during her illness, I nursed her, held the bowl of tea she liked because it was easier to drink from than from a cup; she had become my little girl, uniting for me with that essential child she was in her first photograph.”<sup>697</sup> There is something childlike about the historian’s decision to organize (play with?) the bullets on the bed, a sense echoed in the colorful playfulness of *Let’s be honest, the weather helped*. The uncanny juxtaposition of bed and bullets suggests a child’s spontaneity, but also the prosaic nature of violence and war, which reflects the blurring boundaries between the privacy of the home and the public stage on which the war takes place.

My close reading of *Missing Lebanese Wars* comprises the first half of this chapter about Walid Raad. While Raad does not frame *The Atlas Group* project in terms of self-representation, he does draw on his experiences as a young person living in Beirut during the civil war. However, in referencing theories and moments in the history of photography, particularly focusing on the medium’s representational capacity, the visual and textual narratives he presents simultaneously stymie the authenticity of Raad’s self-representations. In the next section, I look at two works in *Scratching on Things*. Again, I consider Raad’s references to important art historical predecessors who, at different times in history, challenged the status quo. In making these connections, I argue that *Scratching on Things* illustrates Raad’s concerns with the quickly growing art world in the Middle East, in particular the Gulf.

**I am rumored to be an Arab artist: *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World***

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<sup>697</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 72.

## *Reflections*

As evidenced by my discussion of *The Atlas Group* and the video *Missing Lebanese Wars*, Raad's critiques are rarely straightforward. His "message" is mediated through multiple layers and digressions that take the viewer along for a ride that dips in and out of his family history, national history, and art history. The narratives he scripts integrate fiction and rumor inserted into contemporary and historical contexts in order to conjure doubt. Doubt enacts an important function, for it prompts audiences to first question and then linger within the narratives, thereby creating the possibility for critical engagement with the stories in his work. He employs the same strategy in *Scratching on Things*.<sup>698</sup> Whereas *The Atlas Group* took the concept and form of the archive, *Scratching on Things* is organized as a book, and its works are described as the preface, chapters, appendices, plates, and indices. As does the archive, the book possesses authority, which is imbued in Raad's works. In *Scratching on Things*, Raad considers the sizable and ongoing investments in the Middle Eastern art world, particularly in the Gulf, whose oil revenues are being poured into the arts and culture sector. His concerns, however, are cloaked in unlikely stories that nevertheless possess formal and conceptual hints that reference art historical predecessors who challenged the art world status quo in ways that nonetheless became mainstream. The works on which I focus, *Preface to the Second Edition: Plates I-IV* and *Section 139: The Atlas Group (1989-2004)*, reference Claude Monet and Marcel Duchamp, respectively.

Raad describes *Preface to the Second Edition: Plates I-IV* (2012) (Figure 5.26, Figure 5.27, Figure 5.28, Figure 5.29, Figure 5.30) with the following text:

I was recently taken aback by how most paintings on display in the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha lack some (but not all) reflections. I decided to provide some with

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<sup>698</sup> I read Raad's seemingly oversimplified use of the term "Arab" as an implicit critique reflection of the tendency to neatly encapsulate an extremely diverse group of people. I discuss this issue in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

these works. I am hoping that the reflections in my photographs will eventually leave my works and attach themselves to the paintings in the museums.<sup>699</sup>

The works that accompany this text are, indeed, five monochrome photographs that depict the reflections of framed artworks cast onto what appears to be a shiny grey concrete floor. While the images of the paintings are obscured, their frames are more easily identifiable: some are ornate and gilded, others are simple. Verging on the abstract, the reflections are reminiscent of Claude Monet, whose paintings were experiments with visual perception. In particular, Monet was drawn to the ways in which light played on surfaces, leading him to eventually turn “his vision downward on to the surface of the pond and seeing trees and sky only as reflections,” as curators George Shackelford and Mary Ann Stevens explain.<sup>700</sup> From this came his famous water lily paintings, as in *Water Lilies* (1920) (Figure 5.31), a canvas on which such reflections are juxtaposed with plants that float on the surface of the water in a play of mediated representations. His use of loose, identifiable brush strokes and bright colors highlight the vibrancy of the scenes he strove to depict.<sup>701</sup>

Monet was one of the Impressionists, a stylistically diverse group of artists who were nonetheless united in their rejection of the conventions associated with the Académie des Beaux-Arts.<sup>702</sup> Their significant departures included the use of unconventional compositions and

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<sup>699</sup> Raad, “*Preface to the Second Edition: Plates I-IV*,” accessed August 28, 2013, <http://www.scratchingonthings.com/works/004/>.

<sup>700</sup> See George T.M. Shackelford and MaryAnn Stevens, “Water Lilies (Series of Water Landscapes, 1903-1909),” in *Monet in the 20th Century*, by Paul Hayes Tucker with Shackelford and Stevens (London, Boston, New Haven: Royal Academy of Arts, Museum of Fine Arts, published in association with Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>701</sup> Félix Fénéon poetically described Monet’s *Grainstacks* (1890-1891), exhibited at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in Paris in May 1891: “When did Monet’s colours ever come together in more harmonious clamour, with more sparkling impetus? It was the evening sun that most exalted Grainstacks: in summer, they were haloed in purple flakes of fire; in winter, their phosphorescent shadows rippled in the sun, and, a sudden frost enameling them blue, they glittered on a sky first pink, then gold.” Quoted in Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet or the Triumph of Impressionism* (Köln: Taschen, 1999), 279-280.

<sup>702</sup> The name of the movement was derisively coined by the unsympathetic art critic Louis Leroy based on Monet’s *Impression, Sunrise* (1872). See Louis Leroy, “L’Exposition des Impressionnistes,” *Le Charivari*, 25 April 1874. A translation of the article can be found in John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, 4th revised ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Greenwich, Connecticut, 1973), 256-261.

framing, a reflection of the influence of photography.<sup>703</sup> Rejecting the dominance of history paintings and mythological subject matter, the Impressionists painted still lifes and landscapes, often incorporating contemporary subject matter. With the technological innovations in oil paints, they moved out of the studio to paint in *plein air*. Their works possessed nothing of the somber color palettes, symmetrical compositions, clean lines, and effaced brush strokes, which the Académie des Beaux-Arts deemed acceptable. Consistently rejected by the powerful Salon de Paris, the Impressionists formed an independent cooperative, the *Société Anonyme Coopérative des Artistes Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs*, through which they mounted their own exhibitions.<sup>704</sup> Despite the resistance and rejection the Impressionists faced, today their work is firmly positioned within the history of modern art, particularly for their experiments with the relationship between form and meaning, a project that would be taken on again and again.

Raad's use of the term "reflection," both in his narrative and in the photographs, reference Monet's experiments painting reflections on the surface of the pond outside his home in Giverny. Like Monet, Raad turns "his vision downward," this time on to the surface of the floor of a major edifice of Arab art, the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha (here I use the term "edifice" both literally and figuratively to point to the museum's prominent position in the field of Arab art). In this case, alternate definitions of the term "reflection" are useful in shedding light on the project. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "reflection" as "the action or process of thinking carefully or deeply about a particular subject, typically involving influence from one's past life and experiences; contemplation, deep or serious thought or consideration, esp. of a

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<sup>703</sup> See Francoise Heibrun, "Impressionism and Photography," *History of Photography* 33, no. 1 (February 2009): 18-25. The University of Michigan Art Museum mounted an exhibition to explore the relationship between photography and Impressionist painting in 2009 called *The Lens of Impressionism: Photography and Painting Along the Normandy Coast, 1850-1874*. See Anonymous, "Reexamining the Link between Rise of Photography and Impressionism," *Montage: arts and creativity* (October 2009), accessed December 17, 2013 <http://www.montage.umich.edu/2009/10/reexamining-link-between-rise-of-photography-and-impressionism/>.

<sup>704</sup> Bernard Denvir, *Impressionism: The Painters and the Paintings* (Toronto: NDE Publishers, 1999), 9.

spiritual nature.”<sup>705</sup> Involving an extensive process of research and collection, Raad’s art making certainly involves depth of thinking.<sup>706</sup> I argue that *Scratching on Things* evidences Raad’s reflection on his experience as an artist who came to fame just as art from the Middle East was gaining traction in the west, a process to which he contributed.

*Preface to the Second Edition* seems to cheekily suggest that Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art is missing more than images, despite its self-appointed mandate. The museum’s website and past activities indicate a focus on Arab art, including a considerable collection comprised of art from “every Arab country” that “highlight [its] significance.”<sup>707</sup> For this reason, the museum also has a research department.<sup>708</sup> Mathaf (which means “museum” in Arabic) opened in 2010 and is the first public museum dedicated to modern Arab art. Its holdings of over 6000 works dating from the late 19th to the mid-20th century were collected by H.E. Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali Al-Thani, a member of Qatar’s ruling family and art patron who also founded the museum.<sup>709</sup> In inaugurating such a museum, the Qatar Museums Authority seems to verify what scholars have been documenting for decades, but which has only recently come to light in the west with the work of US and Europe-based scholars—a history of modern

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<sup>705</sup> OED, third edition, September 2009.

<sup>706</sup> Raad’s engagement with research is mentioned in H.G. Masters, “Those Who Lack Imagination Cannot Imagine What is Lacking,” *ArtAsiaPacific* 65 (September and October 2009): 124-135.

<sup>707</sup> Mathaf, “Our Collection,” accessed December 19, 2013, <http://www.mathaf.org/en/collection>. In addition to the works of art he collected, H.E. Sheikh Hassan bin Mohamed bin Ali Al Thani also collected documents to produce an archive that focuses on Arab artists and artworks. That said, the museum also displays international art, as evidenced by a solo exhibition of works by the Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang (5 December 2011—26 May 2012).

<sup>708</sup> Mathaf, “Mathaf Research Department,” accessed December 19, 2013, <http://www.mathaf.org/en/research>.

<sup>709</sup> H.E. Al-Thani began collecting in 1986 and in 1994 opened a private museum. According to Damaris Colhoun, Mathaf came into being as an institution and not a commercial venture because of H.E. Al-Thani’s interest in promoting understanding and research of Arab art. The private museum was adopted by the Qatar Foundation in 2004 and then acquired by the Qatar Museum Authority, a governmental body, in 2009. See Damaris Colhoun, “Qatar Opens First Museum of Modern Arab Art, a Q&A With Chief Curator,” *Huffington Post Blog*, 29 December 2010, accessed August 29, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/damaris-colhoun/as-qatar-prepares-to-open\\_b\\_801055.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/damaris-colhoun/as-qatar-prepares-to-open_b_801055.html).

Arab art.<sup>710</sup> Indeed, one of the museum's inaugural events was an academic conference entitled "Modern Arab Art: Objects, Histories, and Methodologies," produced in conjunction with the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey (AMCA).<sup>711</sup> The conference brought together both emerging and established scholars who have either trained or teach in reputable universities. Their presentations complicate the binary that sets traditional (i.e. authentic) against modern (i.e. foreign), a binary that became especially pronounced upon the dissolution of the colonial powers. Many of the papers presented at the conference are social histories of art, in which works, movements, and artists are considered alongside issues such as the politics of liberation, critiques of colonialism, or the development of identity politics.<sup>712</sup>

While it may seem premature for Raad to pass judgment on whether Mathaf has in its first two years been able to "reflect" on the project it has set forth for itself, Raad references the new museum as a case study in order to examine "the emergence of new art museums, galleries, schools and cultural foundations in cities such as Abu Dhabi, Beirut, Cairo, Doha, Istanbul, Ramallah and Sharjah, among others," the occurrence of which is concurrent with the west's increasing interest in Arab artists.<sup>713</sup> It is a phenomenon worth investigating, as this dissertation seeks to demonstrate. As Raad states, "most paintings...lack some (but not all) reflections." In other words, the works (and by extension, Mathaf) are reflective, but of what? Raad never tells his audiences but points in the general direction: "I am intrigued by the increased visibility of the

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<sup>710</sup> Pioneering scholars in the Middle East include Charbel Dagher (Professor, University of Balamand, Lebanon), Wijdan Ali (Ph.D., University of London), Salwa Mikdadi (independent scholar and curator), Kamal Boullata (independent scholar and artist), and Nasser Rabbat (Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology). Though Rabbat specializes in architecture, his openness to accepting students interested in researching modern and contemporary Arab art has yielded significant results, in particular the scholarship of Sarah Rogers and Anneka Lenssen.

<sup>711</sup> The conference was held at the museum from December 16-17, 2010.

<sup>712</sup> Papers presented at the conference are viewable on Mathaf's youtube page, accessed December 3, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Modern+Art%3A+Objects%2C+Histories%2C+and+Methodologies](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Modern+Art%3A+Objects%2C+Histories%2C+and+Methodologies).

<sup>713</sup> See Sylvia Smith, "Venice Biennale to host largest ever presence of Arab art," accessed December 3, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-23664730>.

makers, sponsors, consumers and histories of ‘Arab art,’ and more so by the acceleration in the development of new infrastructures for the visual arts in the Arabian Gulf.”<sup>714</sup> In the midst of the excitement—and, in some cases, dismay—over the redirection of huge sums of money and energy into art and culture in the Middle East, Raad’s project gives pause to reflect on the underlying intentions behind this burgeoning field.<sup>715</sup> He gives no indication, yet his appropriation of Monet, who started off as an art world outsider, suggests a critical stance.

Here I return to the text with which I began this dissertation. While Raad indicates the context out of which his concerns emerge—the development of the art industry in the Middle East and the Gulf in particular—he indicates that

I am not interested in identifying and unpacking the complex and/or simple motives that prompt the sheikhs and sheikhas, emirs, kings, princes, ministers of culture and others in the Gulf and elsewhere in the Arab world to invest massively in the arts. Rather, I concentrate on some of the gestures, stories, forms and colors made available by the emerging infrastructures, especially when these are screened alongside Jalal Toufic’s concept of “the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster.”<sup>716</sup>

Rather than consider the political, social, economic or cultural contexts out of which investment in the arts in the Arab world have emerged, Raad’s interest lies with the formal aspects “made available by the emerging infrastructures.” While his stated interest in “gestures, stories, forms and colors” may seem confusing, Jalal Toufic’s writings offer a space for such musings.

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<sup>714</sup> Raad, <http://www.scratchingonthings.com/>.

<sup>715</sup> The chairwoman of the Qatar Museums Authority, Sheikha al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani is behind art buying that some worry will price others out of the market. Robin Pogrebin, “Qatari Riches are Buying Art World Influence,” *New York Times*, July 22, 2013, accessed December 19, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/23/arts/design/qatar-uses-its-riches-to-buy-art-treasures.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/23/arts/design/qatar-uses-its-riches-to-buy-art-treasures.html?_r=0). The Economist calls Sheikha Mayassa “the art world’s most powerful woman.” See Anonymous, “Qatar’s culture queen,” *The Economist*, March 31, 2012, accessed December 19, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/node/21551443>.

<sup>716</sup> Raad, <http://www.scratchingonthings.com/>. The concept of the withdrawal of tradition was first presented in Jalal Toufic, *Over-Sensitivity* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1996) and elaborated in Jalal Toufic, *Forthcoming* (Berkeley, CA: Atelos, 2000). The essay is also available as a download on Toufic’s website. See Jalal Toufic, “Downloads,” accessed August 30, 2013, <http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm>.

Toufic is Raad's contemporary. He is a Lebanese thinker, writer and video artist who teaches at the Department of Communication Design in Kadir Has University in Istanbul.<sup>717</sup> Born to an Iraqi father and a Palestinian mother, two peoples whose histories entail brutal regimes, sanctions, war and occupation, these histories have bearing on his writings. However, his work is not overtly political.<sup>718</sup> They deal with film, literature, and religion, among other subjects. Toufic and Raad met in Lebanon in 1992, but as the latter explains, it wasn't until much later that Toufic's work began to resonate with him.<sup>719</sup> As he indicates, Toufic's concept of the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster is significant in *Scratching on Things*, and he explains it:

With this concept, Toufic considers how disasters affect tradition. He pays particular attention to the rare instances when artworks are affected immaterially, in more subtle and insidious ways than has hitherto been thought. Moreover, Toufic characterizes such immaterial effects as a "withdrawal," not in the sense that an artwork is hidden (to safeguard against its destruction; nor because it does not conform to the reigning ideological and political outlook of the time) but in the sense that extant cultural artifacts are treated by sensitive artists in their own artworks as though destroyed, as unavailable to vision, for example. In his essay, Toufic also proposes that artists have at times attempted to resurrect such withdrawn artworks, albeit with great doubt as to their

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<sup>717</sup> Toufic's work has been exhibited at the Tate Modern, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Witte de With, among others.

<sup>718</sup> He writes: "Lebanese filmmakers and more so videomakers should not make films or videos to try to understand and make understandable what happened during the war years. While social scientists, whether sociologists, economists, etc., can provide us with more or less convincing reasons, and mystifiers can grossly nonplus us, valid literature and art provide us with intelligent and subtle incomprehension. One of the main troubles with the world is that, unlike art and literature, it allows only for the gross alternative: understanding/incomprehension. Contrariwise, art and literature do not provide us with the illusion of comprehending, of grasping, but allow us to keenly not understand, intimating to us that the alternative is not between comprehension and incomprehension but between incomprehension in a gross manner and while expecting comprehension; and incomprehension in an intelligent and subtle manner..." See Jalal Toufic, "An Interview," in "towards a foreign likeness bent: translation," ed. Jerold Shiroma (duration press.com, nd), accessed December 19, 2013, <http://www.durationpress.com/poetics/translation.pdf>.

<sup>719</sup> Raad and Toufic met in 1992 during a video program for Lebanese artists developed by Raad and video artist Jayce Salloum, and in which Toufic participated. It was on that occasion that the author presented Raad with his book *Distracted*. This story was mentioned by Raad during a seminar given by Raad and Toufic in 2007, videos of which are available at <http://www.unitednationsplaza.org/video/7/>, accessed May 25, 2010. Raad has given a number of public talks and seminars with Toufic, and refers to the withdrawal of tradition in his 2009 exhibition *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Arab World, Part I Volume 1 Chapter 1 (Beirut: 1992-2005)*. The exhibition opened at REDCAT (April—June 2009) at REDCAT, Los Angeles and traveled to the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York the same year. A five-piece box set exhibition catalog was produced. See Walid Raad, *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Arab World, Part I Volume 1 Chapter 1 (Beirut: 1992-2005): A project by Walid Raad* (Los Angeles: California Institute of the Arts/REDCAT, 2009).

resurrecting efforts. In this project, I lean on Toufic's concept because it has provided me with a precise and apt language to frame some of the material, aesthetic and conceptual considerations that I am confronting as I engage the history of Art in the Arab world.<sup>720</sup>

I include this extended quote because of Raad's clarity in explaining Toufic's rather arcane concept, in which Toufic suggests a kind of loss that extends beyond the physical, emotional, and psychological, a loss only certain "sensitive" artists can perceive. Toufic engages with the notion of a "surpassing disaster," a concept that requires cyclical logic to define: whereas damage caused by a disaster is typically understood in terms of psychic trauma, psychological damage, material loss, or bodily harm and death, a surpassing disaster produces additional damage that is imperceptible to most. The question of whether a surpassing disaster has occurred is answered when an artist sensitive enough to perceive the withdrawal attempts to engage with a presumably extant artwork only to find it missing (withdrawn). As Toufic states, "art acts like the mirror in vampire films: it reveals the withdrawal of what we think is still there."<sup>721</sup>

Raad is creative in the way he "leans" on Toufic's concept, as he tells in the narrative about *Preface to the Second Edition*: Raad noticed that most paintings "lack some (but not all) reflections" and decided to "provide some." The narrative suggests that Raad is an artist sensitive enough to detect a withdrawal and that his photographs are an attempt at resurrection. However, his use of Toufic's concept differs from the ways in which the thinker describes it. Toufic explains, for example, that "although at no point is Munir Bashir's performance of *Maqam Kurdi* heard in my video *Credits Included*, it is listed in the music credits."<sup>722</sup> This statement indicates that Bashir's performance of *Maqam Kurdi* was not available to Toufic because it withdrew after a surpassing disaster and because Toufic was "sensitive" enough to detect it, ironically, through its absence. In Raad's re-fashioning of the concept, it is the reflection of the painting, not the

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<sup>720</sup> Raad, <http://www.scratchingonthings.com/>.

<sup>721</sup> Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster* (Forthcoming Books, 2009), 30.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

painting itself, that has withdrawn. Raad alters Toufic's concept in order to visually depict the reflections that withdrew from works in the Mathaf collection. In doing so, he references Monet and suggests his similarly critical positioning.

Another result of Raad's work with Toufic's concept engages the issue of authorship. That he hopes the reflections will leave his photographs "and attach themselves to the paintings in the museum" suggests the reflections have agency. If it comes to pass that the reflections leave his photographs, it will not be because of Raad's doing. The narrative suggests that, while Raad is indeed the maker of the photographs, outside forces act upon them. Even prior to his engagement with Toufic's theory, his artistic strategy challenged the notion of authorial privilege. He did so by attributing authorship of his works in *The Atlas Group* to fictional characters and foundations, or by describing them as found objects kept in an archive, thereby transforming them into remnants of history. What binds *The Atlas Group* and *Scratching on Things* is Raad's approach to representing events and phenomena—the Lebanese civil war and the sudden investment in art in the Middle East at a time when art world players in the west have begun to pay attention—obliquely through focus on the peripheries of the "real" issues. In *The Atlas Group*, these peripheries include the gambling habits of the historians of the civil wars (historians who in the "real world" could not agree on a narrative for Lebanese school history books), or a collection of bullets (whose origins pointed to the countries that supplied weapons used in the war), or a group of objects that a Palestinian woman took with her each time she left a place (pointing to the multiple displacements spurred on by colonial occupations and interventions in Palestine and Lebanon).

In this way, Raad uses conceptual art strategies to reference political histories that might otherwise dominate his work. This also opens up space for experiments in form for as he states,

“I concentrate on some of the gestures, stories, forms and colors made available by the emerging infrastructures.” Raad takes advantage of this to create work that draws on several approaches to art and image making: graphic design and typesetting, architecture, photography, painting, and installation. Toufic’s theory of the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster works similarly: without denying dimensions of a disaster that generally garner attention—the political players, body counts, physical destruction—focus is turned to its impact on art, literature and music (among others), an impact that can only be perceived by a select few. Toufic’s theory suggests that disaster is something that cannot be represented to its full extent, but his suggestion does not necessarily foreclose the possibility of engagement. Rather, it encourages, maybe even requires, a deeper contemplation that might lead to the ability to move beyond the disaster. Raad “leans” on Toufic because it resonates in terms of temperament and allows him to motion to the traumas induced by war, death, displacement, and destruction without directly representing or it.

### **The case of the shrunken oeuvre**

In another *Scratching on Things* work, *Section 139: The Atlas Group (1989-2004)* (2008) (Figure 5.32, Figure 5.33, Figure 5.34, Figure 5.35, Figure 5.36), Raad uses *The Atlas Group* as a case study through which to examine the Arab art world. He tells a story about his gallery in Beirut, Galerie Sfeir-Semler.<sup>723</sup> The narrative reads:

Between 1989 and 2004, I worked on a project titled *The Atlas Group*. It consisted of artworks made possible the Lebanese wars of the past few decades.

In 2005, I was asked to exhibit this project for the first time in Lebanon, in Beirut’s first-of-its-kind white cube art gallery. For some reason, this offer perturbed me and I refused.

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<sup>723</sup> Sfeir-Semler Gallery is a big player in the “Arab art” scene and represents high-profile artists from both the Middle East and Europe. See Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “Top-notch gallery sets to open in Beirut despite political upheaval,” *Daily Star*, March 12, 2005, 12. Raad is also represented by Paula Cooper Gallery in New York and Anthony Reynolds Gallery in London.

In 2006, I was asked again. I refused again.

In 2007, I was asked again. I refused again.

In 2008, I was asked again. I agreed.

Weeks later, when I went to the gallery to inspect my exhibition before its opening, I was startled to find that all my artworks had shrunk to 1/100<sup>th</sup> of their original size.

I subsequently decided to build a smaller white cube befitting my works' new dimensions, and to display them there.<sup>724</sup>

I saw *Section 139* at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York during Raad's 2009 solo exhibition.<sup>725</sup> *Section 139* was placed on a squat pedestal that offered viewers the perspective necessary to examine the miniaturized gallery and the works that filled it. The diorama contains all the trappings of a white cube gallery, with its minimal installation, free standing walls, darkly painted gray or black walls for the video installations, and hardwood flooring. A detail shows the tiny versions of recognizable works framed and accompanied by wall labels. It is indeed a miniature gallery of all of the works from *The Atlas Group*.

While Raad's narrative makes no mention of it, *Section 139* shares an affinity with Marcel Duchamp's *La Boîte-en-valise* (1935-1946) (Figure 5.37), an edition of three hundred in which the artist reproduced sixty-nine of his artworks in miniature, first housing them in suitcases (twenty of which were "deluxe versions" in leather suitcases) and later in boxes. When opened, the suitcases or boxes function as miniature museums with fold-out walls. The function of *La Boîte-en-valise* as self-portraiture was not lost on early viewers. In 1943, Duchamp's friend and collector Walter Arensberg wrote to the artist: "you have invented a new kind of autobiography. It is a kind of autobiography in the performance of marionettes. You have

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<sup>724</sup> Walid Raad, "Section 139: The Atlas Group (1989-2004)," accessed September 28, 2013, <http://www.scratchingonthings.com/works/002/>.

<sup>725</sup> The exhibition *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World/Part I\_Volume 1\_Chapter 1* (Beirut: 1992-2005) was on display from November 6—December 19, 2009.

become the puppeteer of your past.”<sup>726</sup> The autobiography Arensberg’s refers to represents Duchamp’s identity as an artist. The many guises he donned throughout his career led curator Anne Collins Goodyear to characterize his engagement with portraiture and self-portraiture as one that “enabled the artist to demonstrate the radical multiplicity of the self when depicted in different circumstances and under different settings.”<sup>727</sup> Similarly, art historian T.J. Demos reads some of Duchamp’s works in relation to his self-attributed “spirit of expatriation,” arguing that *La Boîte-en-valise* (among other works) models “new modes of being released from the rigid structuring of identity.”<sup>728</sup> Both writers point to the critical potential of Duchamp’s approach to self-representation at a time when war and exile were pressing and prominent realities. In particular, Demos describes Duchamp’s project of self-representation and art making as representative of his “antinationalist pacifism.” While this statement points to possibility that art might position itself as a political stance, *La Boîte-en-valise* has also been read as Duchamp’s response to the evacuation of art’s critical potential through its integration into the mainstream art world.

Duchamp referred to *La Boîte-en-valise* as a “portable museum” and as art historian Benjamin Buchloh convincingly argues, the work reveals “his anticipation of the final destination that his oeuvre would reach in the immanent process of acculturation: the museum.”<sup>729</sup> Buchloh saw this in *La Boîte-en-valise* with Duchamp’s use of modes of display prominent in museums, such as wall texts and the practice of hanging art on the wall. Demos

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<sup>726</sup> Walter Arensberg, draft of letter dated May 6, 1943, quoted in Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp: The Box in a Valise: de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Selavy* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 167.

<sup>727</sup> Anne Collins Goodyear, “Constructing a ‘Made-Up History’: Self-portrayal and the Legacy of Marcel Duchamp,” in *Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture* (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

<sup>728</sup> T.J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>729</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, “The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers,” in *Museums by Artists*, eds. A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 45. The Duchamp’s reference to his work as a portable museum can be found in “interview with J.J. Sweeney,” quoted in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 513.

shows that this was especially highlighted by Duchamp's treatment of *Fountain* (1917) (Figure 5.38), for its inclusion in editions of *La Boîte-en-valise* engaged a process that "serialized" it, thereby suggesting its transformation from "readymade to sculpture and then into a reproduction, rehearsing the institutional fate of avant-garde art."<sup>730</sup> Relying on Roland Barthes' thesis on myth as "a mode of signification; a form," Buchloh indicates that *La Boîte-en-valise* is

an early example of that mimetic practice in which a fictitious secondary construction of mythical language is inscribed within the very conception of the work itself in order to anticipate and "vanquish myth from inside" in the process of acculturation.<sup>731</sup>

The "fictitious secondary construction of mythical language" that Buchloh reads in Duchamp's work was based on the artist's anti-bourgeoisie stance and response to the institutionalization of avant-garde art via its entry into museums. This was especially evidenced by the crisis of Surrealism in the 1930s, particularly with the major retrospective at the Galerie Beaux-Arts, a gallery associated with the socio-economic upper class that had a typically conservative approach to art.<sup>732</sup> Decades earlier, Duchamp had staked his position on the rarification of art with his readymades, most famously with *Fountain*. Highlighting the conceptual centrality of mass-produced commodities, Duchamp pointed out the readymade's "lack of uniqueness," which cleared room for a critique of the notion that an artwork obtains value through its status as an original work.<sup>733</sup> The poet Octavio Paz highlighted this, adding that the readymade also attacks the notion of taste, for readymades "transcend beauty and ugliness...because they are not works but rather question-marks or signs of negation that oppose the idea of works."<sup>734</sup> Duchamp

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<sup>730</sup> Demos, *Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, 30. Italics in the original.

<sup>731</sup> Buchloh, "Museum Fictions," 48. I discuss Barthes' theory of myth in Chapter Three (Hassan Musa).

<sup>732</sup> Demos, *Exiles*, 153. Demos wrote that "the fact that the surrealists were now inhabiting a rarified and elite space associated with a [capitalist, centralized, police-like and static] state, in effect designated it as the privileged site for their own revolution, clearly presented a glaring contradiction." *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>733</sup> Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of 'Readymades,'" In *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), 142.

<sup>734</sup> Octavio Paz, "The Ready-Made," in *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 84.

vehemently rejected the privileging of the original, illustrated by his statement that he purposely attempted “to wipe out the idea of the original [in the visual arts], which exists neither in music, nor in poetry.”<sup>735</sup> It is perhaps ironic then that in producing his miniature reproductions, Duchamp engaged a meticulous process of hand coloring in order to avoid the high cost of quality color reproductions, thereby producing originals that possessed what Demos identified as “auratic traces.”<sup>736</sup> Reference to the notion of the aura and its relationship to the original artwork harkens back to philosopher Walter Benjamin’s argument that mechanical reproduction evacuates an artwork of its aura because reproductions lack traces of the artist’s hand. Duchamp’s simultaneous rejection of the original and implementation of hand coloring in the production of the reproductions exemplifies the open-ended nature of his practice and its complicated contribution to the philosophical conversation about the nature of art and its institutionalization.

Constituent of *Scratching on Things*, a project that proposes to narrate and illustrate “a history of art in the Arab world,” I read *Section 139* in light of Buchloh’s discussion of art’s acculturation within the institution of the museum.<sup>737</sup> It is suggested in the title of the work, *Section 139: The Atlas Group (1989-2004)*, which notably includes *The Atlas Group* dates, information that Raad withheld engaged with the project, a strategy that challenges the status quo in museum practices. Rather than ride the wave of euphoria generated by the tremendous funds and energies being invested in art in the Middle East, Raad’s reference to *La Boîte-en-valise*

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<sup>735</sup> Quoted in Goodyear, *Inventing Duchamp*, 90.

<sup>736</sup> Demos, *Exiles*, 51-2. Duchamp employed a number of different approaches to reproduce his work, including hand painting and an outdated type of collotype printing called *pochoir* (involving a process of hand coloring and stencils). He indicated that it would take approximately one month for a skilled craftsman to produce a satisfactory print. Duchamp also cut out high-quality color images from magazines.

<sup>737</sup> Raad’s critique is also informed by Douglas Crimp, with whom he studied at Rochester. Crimp’s book *On the Museum’s Ruins* presented a poststructuralist critique of authorship and authenticity; a materialist critique of aesthetic idealism, and the avant-garde critique of art’s institutionalization. See Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins*, with photographs by Louise Lawler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

suggests the presence of a problematic situation that parallels the situation of art to which Duchamp was responding. In his well-received presentation of his exhibition “Scratching on Things I could Disavow” at dOCUMENTA (13), Raad outlines two dominant positions on the investment in art in the Gulf.<sup>738</sup> One explains the investment via the possibility that the super-rich leaders in the Gulf have come to recognize the potential that art and world class museums can have on tourism. The other argues that young leaders in the Gulf who have been educated in the west are training their energies on the industry of art and culture in order to democratize their socially conservative countries through exposure to art, which will lead to democratization of other aspects of society. Raad goes the diplomatic route and recognizes the contradictions inherent to human beings, to which the Sheikhs and Sheikhas are not immune.<sup>739</sup>

Notable differences between the Duchamp and Raad works indicate that the processes to which Duchamp was keenly attuned are firmly in place. For one, Raad produces his “originals” using media that are inherently reproducible, such as photography, video and inkjet prints, from the outset dismissing the possibility that his works might possess the aura of the original. And while Duchamp’s use of the suitcase “mediated upon the existential vulnerability of homelessness,” Demos argues that *La Boîte-en-valise* also incorporates the power of dislocation to reposition Duchamp’s identity: “creating an innovative artwork that escapes all traditional categories, it also proposes the means by which Duchamp modeled a form of subjectivity that freed itself from the strictures of an increasingly claustrophobic national identity.”<sup>740</sup> This is indeed reflected in some of the more hopeful considerations of the global exhibition

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<sup>738</sup> An audio recording of the presentation is available at Walid Raad, “Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World,” accessed February 14, 2014, [http://www.scratchingonthings.com/files/SOTICD\\_walkthrough\\_en.mp3](http://www.scratchingonthings.com/files/SOTICD_walkthrough_en.mp3). For positive reviews, see Jerry Saltz, Jerry Saltz: Eleven Things That Struck, Irked, or Awed Me at Documenta 13,” accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.vulture.com/2012/06/saltz-notes-on-documenta-13.html>; MORE.

<sup>739</sup> A transcript of the presentation is available at Walid Raad, “Walkthrough, Part II,” *e-flux journal*, no. 49 (November 2013), accessed May 1, 2014, [http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article\\_8974742.pdf](http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8974742.pdf).

<sup>740</sup> Demos, *Exiles*, 21.

phenomenon as an utterance of inclusive transnational and multicultural spaces in which national boundaries are transgressed in the production of the global citizen.<sup>741</sup> Yet in replacing Duchamp's suitcase for a gallery, Raad highlights the sale of art, particularly illustrating the gallery's necessary mobility in a moment where art fairs have come to displace galleries.<sup>742</sup>

Galleries are not the sole institutions implicated in monetary aspects of art, for as art historian Rafal Niemojewski writes, "with few exceptions [biennials] are founded on the basis of ideological and economic considerations rather than artistic ones."<sup>743</sup> Raad's frequent travels to these fairs, as well as biennials, museum inaugurations, and other prominent events position him within this context, further highlighted by his approach to production—art critic Kaelen Wilson-Goldie writes that "Raad's studio is essentially his laptop."<sup>744</sup> The laptop has come to replace the suitcase as a symbol for the itinerant artist in the globalized art world. As an art making tool, the laptop brings with it the inherent impossibility of aura, originality and authenticity, which Raad tempers with his insistence on blurring the lines between truth and fiction. Just as Duchamp's use of hand painting complicated his rejection of the original, so does Raad push against the usefulness of black-and-white binary thinking that positions truth as more valuable than fiction. Raad's network of references to art history and the history of the institutionalization of avant-garde art, his insistent prevention of enabling a pinpointing of truth and authenticity (thereby rejecting their relevance) emerges as an art practice that integrates both the work of the art historian and critic. By integrating self-portraiture into this project, Raad presents a compelling

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<sup>741</sup> Okwui Enwezor, "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," *Documents* 23 (Spring 2004): 2-19.

<sup>742</sup> For a discussion of the rise in art fairs and a brief historical outline of the role of galleries, see Peter Schjeldahl, "All is Fairs," *The New Yorker* 88, no. 12 (May 7, 2012): 32. Also see Shane Ferro, "Art Fairs are the New Normal: 5 Striking Findings from Recent Research on the Art Market's Globalization," Blouin Artinfo, January 8, 2011, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/38220/art-fairs-are-the-new-normal-5-striking-findings-from-recent-research-on-the-art-markets-globalization/>.

<sup>743</sup> Niemojewski, "Venice or Havana," 90.

<sup>744</sup> Wilson-Goldie, "Generation Gap."

approach to the integration of autobiography into art while simultaneously preventing a process of exoticizing consumption. Raad contributes to the history of art by applying complex avant-garde strategies to the project of self-representation, thereby claiming a prominent position within a genealogy of an art history bookended between John Baldessari and Marcel Duchamp.

### **The politics of art, by way of a conclusion**

Thus far, my discussion of *Scratching on Things* has highlighted Raad's critique of the emerging art world in the Middle East and Raad's tactics to keep politics out of the project. However, as evidenced by two initiatives focused on the United Arab Emirates, Raad is far from apolitical. The first refers to the 10<sup>th</sup> Sharjah Biennial in 2011, during which a number of isolated yet politically inflected situations events came to a head.<sup>745</sup> The curatorial strategy, which was determined long before January 2011, was structured like a film plot, the themes of which included "Treason, Necessity, Insurrection, Affiliation, Corruption, Devotion, Disclosure and Translation" and characters including "The Traitor, The Collaborator, The Experimentalist and the Traducer."<sup>746</sup> Though it was coincidental, the theme resonated with political realities in the Middle East, prominently illustrated by the Arab Spring, particularly the deposing of the Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011 and the start of the Egyptian revolution against then President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak in the same month. While the correspondence between art and life made for a powerful biennial, it also triggered government suspicions, especially when a visitor staged a protest against the United Arab Emirate's decision to send troops to Bahrain in an attempt to put down anti-government protests in the neighboring and economically ailing country. One person who was detained and interrogated by the police

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<sup>745</sup> I was employed as an assistant curator to Suzanne Cotter. This discussion derives from my experience.

<sup>746</sup> Sharjah Art Foundation, "Sharjah Biennial 10 Welcome," accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.sharjahart.org/biennial/sharjah-biennial-10/welcome>.

was asked about the Sharjah Art Foundation director, Jack Persekian's political intentions.<sup>747</sup> Soon after the biennial opened, Persekian was fired by H.H. Sheikh bin Mohamed Al-Qasimi without notice at the behest of a public outcry that spread among his constituency in response to an artwork by playwright Mustapha Benfodil that was seen as religiously offensive.<sup>748</sup> While the aforementioned events seemed to have nothing to do with Persekian's dismissal, as a constellation of loosely related anecdotes, they illustrate a clashing of priorities and assumptions, especially illustrated by an online petition that demanded Persekian's reinstatement and which was ultimately ignored.<sup>749</sup> Raad was among the signatories who vowed a boycott of Sharjah Art Foundation.

Prior to the Sharjah affair, a number of artists had their sights set on yet another issue in the United Arab Emirates concerning labor practices on the island of Saadiyat in Abu Dhabi. In particular, they were concerned about the conditions under which workers building the satellite Guggenheim live and work, which was reported in two Human Rights Watch reports.<sup>750</sup>

Organized under a coalition called Gulf Labor, a group of artists and culture workers identified a

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<sup>747</sup> Anonymous, interview with the author, Sharjah, UAE, April 15, 2011. This person preferred to remain anonymous. Persekian is now the director of the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit, Palestine.

<sup>748</sup> For a discussion of Persekian's dismissal, see Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Sharjah Biennial 10," *Artforum* 49, no. 10, (Summer 2011): 399; Randy Kennedy, "Sharjah Biennial Director Fired Over Artwork Deemed Offensive," *Arts Beat New York Times Blog*, April 7, 2011, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/07/sharjah-biennial-director-fired-over-offensive-artwork/>; Jennifer Higgie and Tirdad Zolghadr, "Sharjah Biennial 10," *Frieze*, no. 140 (June-August 2011), accessed May 1, 2014, <https://www.frieze.com/issue/review/sharjah-biennial-10/>; Helen Stoilas, "Support for Persekian after sacking," *The Art Newspaper*, April 7, 2011, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Support-for-Persekian-after-sacking/23553>.

<sup>749</sup> The petition was circulated via the website [www.ipetitions.com](http://www.ipetitions.com) as well as e-flux. While the webpage was active as of 20 December 2013, the petition is no longer visible on the page. See Sharjah Call for Action, accessed December 20, 2013, <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/sharjahcall4action/>, and e-flux, "An unwarranted dismissal in Sharjah," accessed December 20, 2013, <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/an-unwarranted-dismissal-in-sharjah/>.

<sup>750</sup> See Human Rights Watch, "The Island of Happiness," May 19, 2009, accessed December 6, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/05/18/island-happiness-0>; Human Rights Watch, "The Island of Happiness Revisited," March 21, 2012, accessed December 6, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/03/21/island-happiness-revisited-0>.

number of problems regarding wages, recruitment fees, safety, and housing.<sup>751</sup> Their work began with a 2010 petition signed by 43 artists and sent to the Guggenheim. When this failed to yield results, they announced a public boycott of Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi in 2011.<sup>752</sup> Their boycott was framed in a letter addressed to Richard Armstrong, the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the goal was to “obtain contractual guarantees that will protect the right of workers employed in the construction and maintenance of its new branch museum in Abu Dhabi.”<sup>753</sup> The petition explains that

Human rights violations are currently occurring on Saadiyat Island, the location of the new museum. In two extensive reports on the UAE, Human Rights Watch has documented a cycle of abuse that leaves migrant workers deeply indebted, poorly paid, and unable to defend their rights or even quit their jobs. The UAE authorities responsible for developing the island have failed to tackle the root causes of abuse: unlawful recruiting fees, broken promises of wages, and a sponsorship system that gives employers virtually unlimited power over workers.<sup>754</sup>

While the group supports the fair treatment of workers in art institutions internationally, the main reason for the focus on Saadiyat centers on Abu Dhabi’s “economic position,” which they indicate is healthy enough that it “could very easily be stretched to accommodate better conditions and wages for workers, but has not been.”<sup>755</sup> In addition to the petition, Gulf Labor announced a project at the Venice Biennale in October 2013 called “52 Weeks of Gulf Labor,” a one-year project in which artists and writers are asked to contribute a work that highlights the

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<sup>751</sup> Gulf Labor lists the problems on a FAQ: “1. Recruitment fees and relocation costs paid by workers. 2. Confiscation of worker passports by employers. (Though we recognize that this has appreciably improved in recent years.) 3. Poor and unsafe housing and living conditions, even in the Saadiyat Construction Village that is meant to embody the highest standards for worker welfare upheld by TDIC; 4. Lack of freedom to change jobs or to form trade unions for collective bargaining; 5. Lack of open platforms for workers to express grievances or abuses without fear of recrimination or dismissal.” Gulf Labor, “Gulf Labor FAQ,” accessed December 6, 2013, <http://gulflabor.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Gulf-Labor-FAQ.pdf>. The name of the group is variously spelled either “Gulf Labor” or “Gulflabor” on the website. Here I use the first spelling. TDIC is now called Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority (TCA).

<sup>752</sup> <http://gulflabor.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Gulf-Labor-FAQ.pdf>

<sup>753</sup> <http://gulflabor.org/sign-the-petition/>

<sup>754</sup> Gulf Labor, “Who’s Building the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi?,” accessed December 4, 2013, <http://gulflabor.org/sign-the-petition/>.

<sup>755</sup> For example, they reference a conflict over contract negotiations between Sotheby’s and unionized art handlers in New York. <http://gulflabor.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Gulf-Labor-FAQ.pdf>.

plight of workers. Along with a formal press release, Gulf Labor pasted fliers throughout venues in the Venice Biennale (Figure 5.39 and Figure 5.40). Most recently, signatory artist Doris Bittar organized an art exhibition called “Labor-Migrant-Gulf” at the Southwestern College Gallery in Chula Vista, California, in an attempt to illustrate the links between migrant workers in United States and the Gulf.<sup>756</sup>

Raad is a member of the Working Group, which organizes Gulf Labor’s activities. He maintains a collaborative and optimistic spirit about Gulf Labor, as evidenced in an interview with art critic Louisa Buck. When the Guggenheim invited Raad and other artists for their input on the UAE branch’s collection, he indicated:

I’m being given a voice here, and is it simply a voice in the sense of “which works do I want to sell?” or is it “how do we build a fantastic infrastructure for the arts that is sensitive to the historical, aesthetic, formal, critical and labour issues”? And it seems as if the Guggenheim is interested in this conversation.<sup>757</sup>

Raad demonstrates an interest in using the agency he has acquired through his status as an artist sought after by the large institutions who wield a great deal of power in order to shape the future of the art world in the Middle East. His contribution to “52 Weeks” highlights the prevalence of Gulf Labor’s concerns across many industries. *If FIFA did...* (2013) (Figure 5.41) is a poster comprised of a print out of a Guardian newspaper article about the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, which demanded that Qatar improve the conditions of workers building the World Cup stadium, scheduled for 2022.<sup>758</sup> In the work, Raad used different colored pens and marked up an article about FIFA. For example, he circled “Fifa” and wrote in “when will

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<sup>756</sup> The exhibition ran from 13 March—10 April 2014.

<sup>757</sup> Louisa Buck, “Artist Interview, Walid Raad: a mediator between worlds,” *The Art Newspaper* 242 (January 2013), accessed December 6, 2013, <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Artist-interview-Walid-Raad-a-mediator-between-worlds/28352>.

<sup>758</sup> Authorship is attributed to the imaginary Farid Sarroukh and Maha Traboulsi “in collaboration with Walid Raad.” Sarroukh and Traboulsi are imaginary co-collaborators with whom Raad has worked before. See Wilson-Goldie, “Profile: Walid Raad.”

Guggenheim, Louvre, British Museum, NYU follow suit?” By focusing on the Guggenheim and Abu Dhabi, two entities that possess power and resources, Raad and his cohort aim for an art world that is just as concerned with workers as they are to the art world super stars and the capital they bring. As Raad indicates, “those working with bricks and mortar deserve the same kind of respect as those working with cameras and brushes.”<sup>759</sup>

Raad’s activist work betrays his concerns for human rights, behind which he throws his weight as a successful artist to creatively and collaboratively devise strategies. As his response to the dismissal of Jack Persekian and his continued work in Gulf Labor indicates, Raad is not afraid to make his perspective known, even when such a stance limits venues for his exhibition. This political work, however, is striking in its difference to his approach to art making, in which what Laura Marks calls “screens and ruses” reign. While politics, whether national or those that shape the art world and its practices of representation, exist, they do so peripherally.

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<sup>759</sup> Nicolai Ouroussoff, “Abu Dhabi Guggenheim Faces Protest,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2011, accessed December 7, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/arts/design/guggenheim-threatened-with-boycott-over-abu-dhabi-project.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/arts/design/guggenheim-threatened-with-boycott-over-abu-dhabi-project.html?_r=0).

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusion

In 2003, the Egyptian artist Basim Magdy issued a manifesto of sorts, writing that stereotypes of “the social, cultural, and political situation in Egypt” have prompted a fascination on the part of western curators with Egyptian artwork that takes these issues as its subject.

Following, he continues,

an obvious pattern can be traced regarding the context in which contemporary Egyptian artists’ work has recently been presented in major international shows. In the majority of these, artists interested in the socio-politics of the local have been selected largely on the basis of their respective geographical background (e.g. Egyptian/Arab/African), bearing in mind the cultural, ethnic, and religious expectations that background is associated with.

Magdy goes on to argue that such exhibitions will inevitably exclude and limit “artistic diversity.”<sup>760</sup> This dissertation illustrates that Magdy is not alone in his concerns, using a close examination of the work of three artists who, to varying extents, critique the desire for the performance of their identity. Their work integrates strategies culled from European art history, thereby falling in line with art historian Terry Smith’s description of contemporary art, which he contends “takes art historical definition of what is, and has been, at stake in modernist art to be

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<sup>760</sup> Basim Magdy, “Walk Like an Egyptian,” *Nafas Art Magazine*, September 2003, <http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2003/magdy>, accessed on 6 May 2014.

an important component within what is most at stake in making art now.”<sup>761</sup> He goes on to write that contemporary art’s

raw materials are example and influence, suggestion and orientation, trial and error, ideas completely realized, trails laid for one’s successors...In other words, the connectivity between objects, ideas, people, and institutions that is the core subject of the art historian’s attention.<sup>762</sup>

In the preceding chapters, I have illustrated the centrality of this approach in the work of Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Hassan Musa, and Walid Raad. Still, as I write in Chapter One, Smith characterizes the contribution of non-EuroAmerican artists to the shape of contemporary art in terms of their engagement with postcolonial critique and the subjects of “identity, nationality and tradition.”<sup>763</sup> I argue that Al-Ghoussein, Musa, and Raad bridge Smith’s two readings, thereby revealing the inadequacies of the sole positioning of their work via the frame of identity.

My line of enquiry uses the west’s developing interest in Arab art to examine a number of intersecting subjects: self-portraiture, identity art, and exhibition making. It may seem ironic to use the genre of self-portraiture to argue against the dominance of identity because of the assumption that self-portraiture reflects the artist’s interiority. However, I show how these artists rely on such assumptions in order to thwart its very possibility, thereby contributing to a shift in self-portraiture that curator Anne Collins Goodyear identifies after the 1960s.<sup>764</sup> She describes a practice of self-portraiture that challenges assumptions, about not only identity but also the genre itself. I do not argue that the potential of identity and biography has been depleted. Rather, I show how Al-Ghoussein, Musa, and Raad engage in referencing issues related to identity with the formal and conceptual tools they acquired as transnational artists who studied, lived, and produced art in multiple places. By highlighting the moments, movements, and influential artists

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<sup>761</sup> Terry Smith, “The State of Art History: Contemporary Art,” *Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 2010): 367.

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

<sup>763</sup> Smith, “The State of Art History,” 380.

<sup>764</sup> See Chapter One. Anne Collins Goodyear, “Repetition as Reputation.”

in art history their work engages, I argue that these artists lay claim to their rightful place within an art historical genealogy.

In Chapters One and Two, I describe how gendered, racial, and cultural identity—that which seemed to determine whether one was the author or the subject of an artwork—emerged as an important subject for artists who were historically excluded from the project of art making, primarily women and people of color. Their work incorporated a very blatant focus on identity in an attempt to alter the ways in which blackness or femininity, for example, signified. Additionally, they, alongside art historians and critics who shared their political platform, revealed the machinations of representational practices that structured identity-based hierarchies. I discuss some of these art works in Chapter One, particularly focusing on the use of performance art and ways artists used the body as the locus from which to examine such practices. In Chapter Two, I write that identity has come to dominate exhibitions of art by non-European American artists and argue that this framing limits recognition of the conceptual, aesthetic, and formal aspects of their work. As evidenced in Smith’s article, this framing is echoed in scholarship.

The histories, strategies, and trajectories to which Al-Ghoussein, Musa, and Raad refer dot the timeline of art history, spanning a trajectory from Renaissance painters of the 16th century to conceptual artists in the 20th. In Chapter Three, I read Musa’s appropriation of François Millet as a critique of the notion of authentic identity. Millet’s work was deemed valuable because contemporary audiences read his paintings of the rural poor as a reflection of his own experience. I argue that Millet’s reception allows Musa to critique the art world’s demands that his work reflect what is perceived to be an authentic African identity. Musa emphasizes that he simultaneously “feels Arab, African, and Western,” illustrating the

impossibility of authenticity to highlight the problems associated with the desire for it.<sup>765</sup> He brings the issue to the African context by including images of Josephine Baker and Sara Baartman into his paintings. Their audiences looked for evidence of Africanity, primitivism, and hypersexuality, which they were seen to embody. Musa's appropriation of their figures alongside his own in his *Autoportrait avec Idees Noires* is a manifestation of Musa's argument that the art world harbors a similar desire for what is seen as authentic African.

In Chapter Four, I hearken Al-Ghoussein's work back to Cindy Sherman's use of her own body to critique constructions of femininity in popular culture through the medium of film. Through the use of staged photography, his photographs reflect his own estranged sense of identity as a Palestinian in exile, thereby positioning himself among Palestinian authors who have expressed similar notions. This attitude is evident in his treatment of Palestinian iconography, which transpires in the ambivalent relationship between his figure and symbols of the Palestinian narrative. Because it is the institution of the nation-state—with its borders, governments, and military—that has most powerfully impacted where he has been able to call "home," he turns his attention to the ways in which national identity is represented and constructed. I refer to scholarship that has linked the genre of landscape with national identity. And because he situates the series on Saadiyat in the United Arab Emirates, an island in construction upon which museums of international repute designed by famed architects will stand, I also refer to the scholarship that identifies the work museums do in the process of representing national identity. My reading reveals his critique of the nation-state, particularly because of its exclusionary practices.

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<sup>765</sup> Musa, "Qui a Inventé les Africains?," 61.

In Chapter Five, I highlight Raad's references to conceptual and avant-garde art, as well as theories that have come to shape the contemporary understanding of the medium of photography. Raad's approach to appropriation is simultaneously coy yet obvious. Formally and conceptually, it is obvious in his borrowings of famous works like Baldessari's dots and Duchamp's portable museum. Yet Raad's intriguing textual narratives act as a subterfuge that directs determination of the subject. Depending on the project, it is either the Lebanese civil war or the burgeoning art world in the Middle East. Key to Raad's strategy is his blurring of the line between fact and fiction. He highlights this by referencing theories written about the medium of photography throughout its history, particularly the assumption that it represents the truth because of its indexical relationship to that which is depicted. Raad's references to the avant-garde, in particular Duchamp's critique of art's institutionalization, enable him to comment on the massive financial investment in the developing Middle Eastern art world without making obvious his concerns over the prioritization of financial and cultural capital over more humanitarian concerns. Raad's engagement with self-portraiture is much less obvious than that of Musa and Al-Ghoussein. I locate it in Raad's reference to Duchamp's *Boite-en-valise* in his work *Section 139: The Atlas Group*. Just as Duchamp's work, a miniaturized version of his oeuvre, has been read as a self-portrait, so do I treat Raad's work. In addition, his suggested association through rumor to a main protagonist in *The Atlas Group* frames it within an autobiographical light that is stymied through the artist's refusal to distinguish between fact and fiction.

By highlighting the uses Al-Ghoussein, Musa, and Raad make of past art in their projects of self-representation, this dissertation has shown how these artists assert the right to use their personal and national histories in their work while simultaneously evidencing critiques of the

dominance of identity art. In their projects, identity emerges as one of a network of subjects and concerns from which they draw to create their work. Contextualization is an important aspect of my methodology, for it highlights the histories and intellectual approaches from which Al-Ghoussein, Musa, and Raad produce their work. Al-Ghoussein applies staging and his interrogation of media representation and identity to photographs, a contribution to the history of Palestinian iconography and literature. Musa's insistence on claiming the right to global art history stems from his political and artistic activities in postcolonial Sudan. Important to this was the project of defining a national identity that is not limited by national or cultural borders. His doctoral studies in art history gave him intimate knowledge of artists and movements to which he regularly refers in his work. Similarly, Raad's doctoral studies armed him with tools culled from conceptual and avant-garde art history. He applies these strategies to the Lebanese civil war and its place in collective memory as well as the impressive financial investment in the art industry of the Middle East. In each of these cases, the artist is keenly aware of the center/periphery binary that had long characterized the relationship between the "west" and the "rest" in the discipline of art history. Though identity art was initially an important way for historically excluded artists to stake a claim to an authorial position in art, today its dominance illustrates the persistence of the binary through the art world's desire for the non-EuroAmerican performance of identity. This dissertation takes "Arab" art as a case study to illustrate the expanse of analytical possibilities by highlighting the artists' engagement with western art history. Their approach is neither derivative nor imitative, however. Rather, their experience reflects the reality of transnationalism and its increasing prevalence in the art world and beyond.

## FIGURES



Figure 1.1: Adrian Piper, *The Mythic Being: Cruising White Woman #1 of 3* (1975), black and white photographic documentation of a performance in Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the artist.

Dear Friend,  
I am black.  
I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.  
I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.  
Sincerely yours,  
Adrian Margaret Smith Piper

Figure 1.2: Adrian Piper, *My Calling Card* (1986), performance with calling card, 2 x 3.5 inches, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 1.3: Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez Peña, *The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992-94), photographic documentation of a performance, courtesy Alexander and Gray and Coco Fusco.



Figure 1.4: Hassan Musa, *Autoportrait en St. Sebastian* (1997), 84.65 x 52 inches, textile paint on pre-printed fabric, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 1.5: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 2 (Self Portrait Series) (Looking at Palestine)* (2003), digital print, 21.65 x 29.5 inches, edition of 6, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.



Figure 1.6: Walid Raad, *Missing Lebanese Wars (in three parts)* (1996), video, 6 minutes, film still, courtesy of Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago, IL, USA) and the artist.



Figure 2.1: Barbara Kruger, *Qui sont les magiciens de la terre?* (1989), painting on panel, courtesy Centre Pompidou, France.



Figure 2.2: James Luna, *Artifact Piece* (1990), mixed media installation, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2.3: James Luna, *Artifact Piece* (1987), photograph of performance at the San Diego Museum of Man in 1987, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2.4: Pat Ward Williams, *What You Lookn At?* (1992), dot screen mural, paint, color Xerox, color photography, and text, 96 x 192 inches, Collection of Pat Ward Williams.



Figure 2.5: Berni Searle, *Snow White* (2001), two projector video installation, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3.1: Alberto Korda, *Guerrillero Heroico* (1960), photograph, 20 x 15.98 inches, Collection of Diana Diaz.

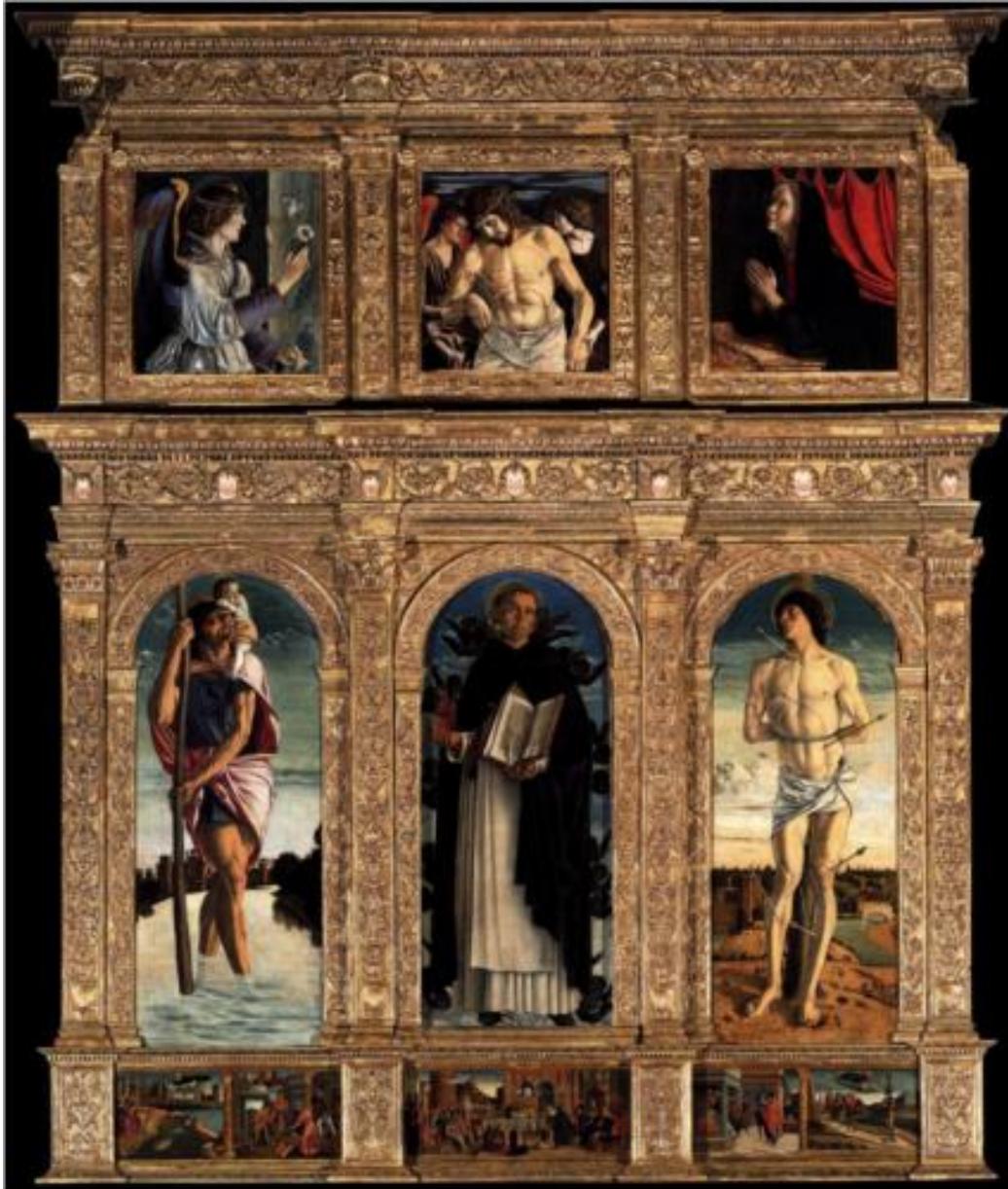


Figure 3.2: Giovanni Bellini, *Polyptych of San Vincenzo Ferreri* (1464-68), tempera paint on panel in the Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice, Italy.



Figure 3.3: Giovanni Bellini, detail of *Polyptych of San Vincenzo Ferreri* (1464-68), tempera paint on panel in the Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice, Italy, 65.75 x 26 inches.

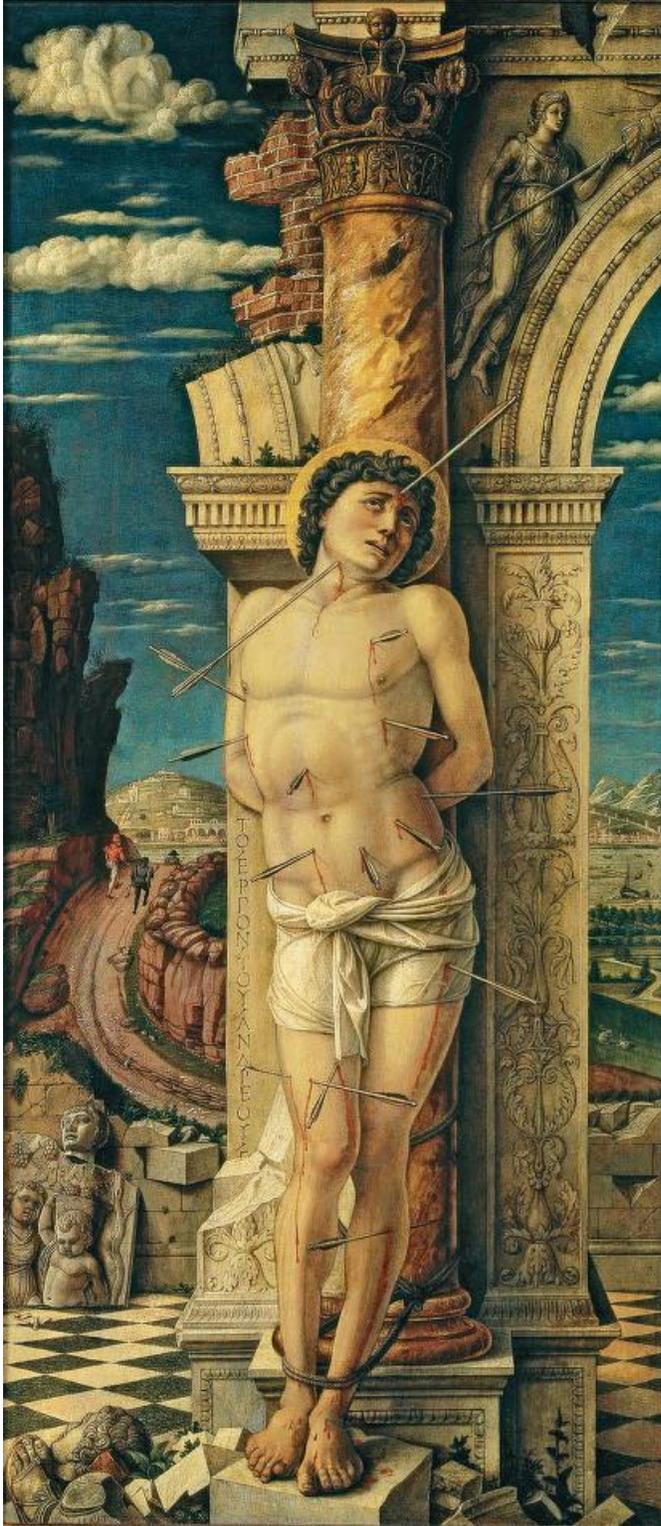


Figure 3.4: Andrea Mantegna, *St. Sebastiano* (1450-59), tempera on panel, 26.77 x 12.05 inches, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien (Vienna, Austria).

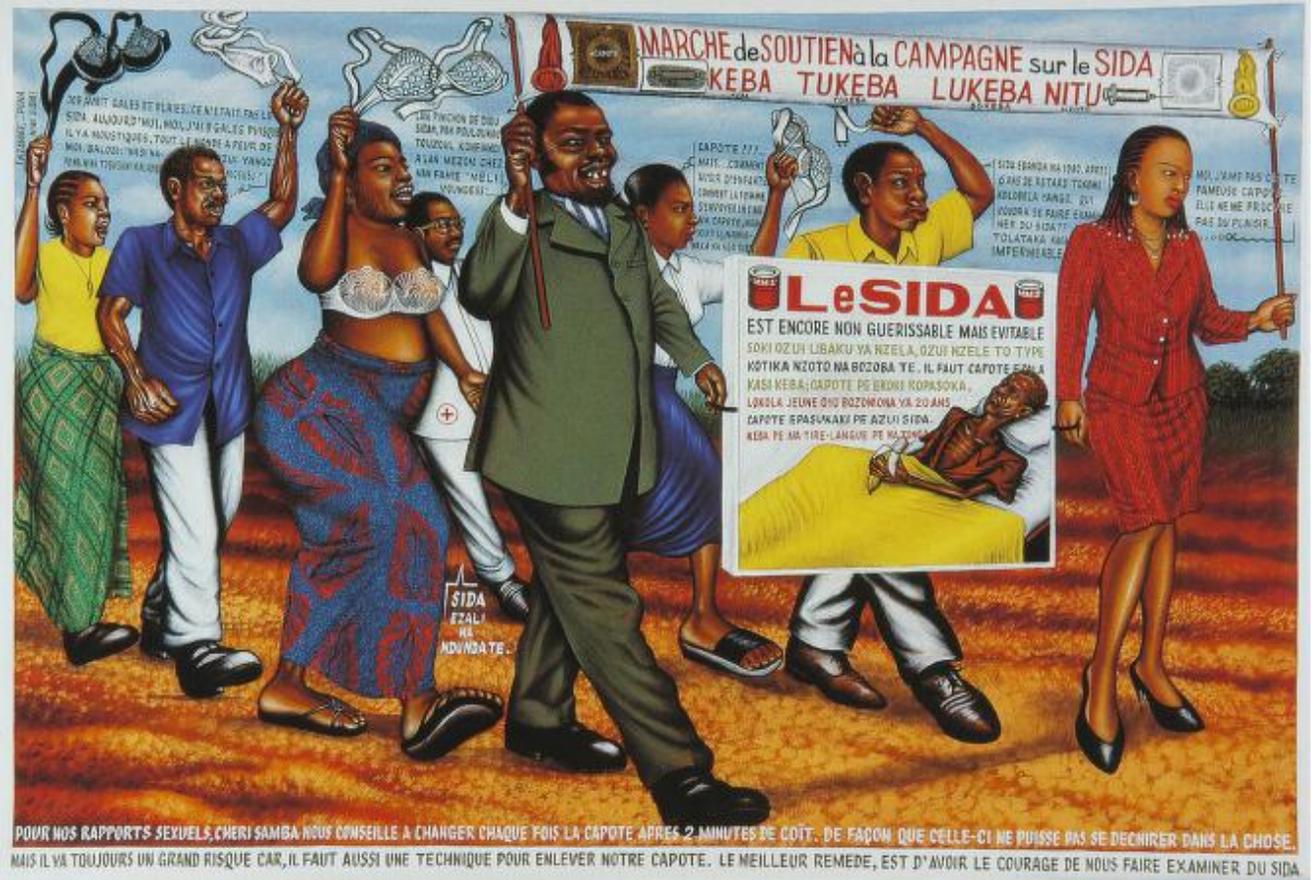


Figure 3.5: Chéri Samba, *Marche de Soutien à la campagne sur le SIDA* (1988), oil paint and sequin on canvas, 53.54 x 78.74 inches, Musée National d'Art Modern (Paris, France).



Figure 3.6: Ibrahim El Salahi, *The Inevitable* (1985), ink on nine panels, 209 x 238 inches, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3.7: François Millet, *The Gleaners* (1857), oil on canvas, 33.1 x 43.7 inches, Musée d'Orsay (Paris, France).



Figure 3.8: Hassan Musa, *The Total Happiness (glaneuses)* (2008), textile paint on pre-printed fabric, 65 x 87 inches, courtesy of the artist.

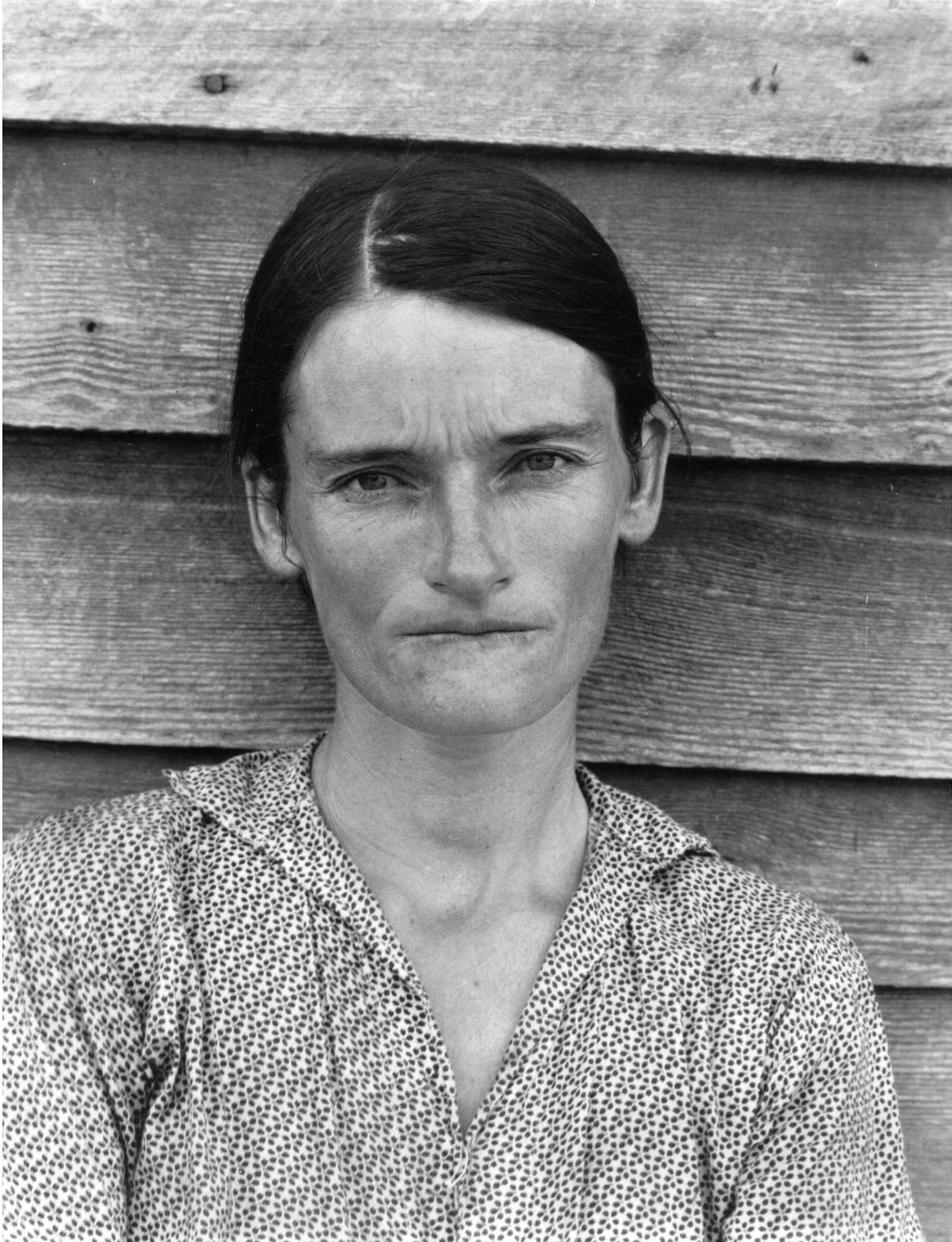


Figure 3.9: Sherrie Levine, *After Walker Evans* (1981), gelatin silver print, 5 x 3.85 inches, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, New York, USA).



Figure 3.10: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #13* (1978), gelatin silver print, 7.56 x 9.45 inches, Collection of the Museum of Modern Art (New York, New York, USA).

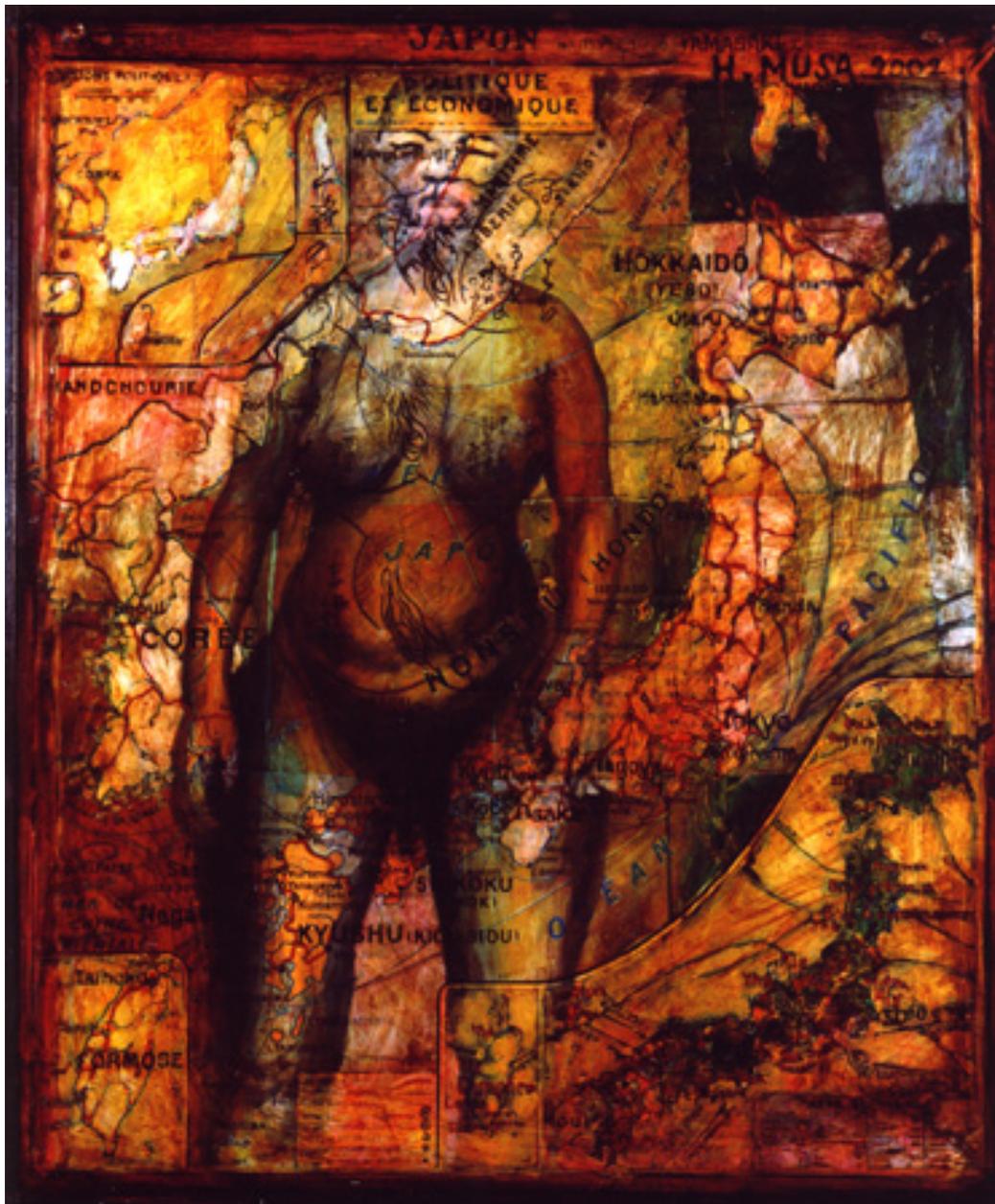


Figure 3.11: Hassan Musa, *Vénus de la Mer du Japon (carte) (Venus Hottentot)* (2002), 47.63 x 39.76 inches, courtesy of the artist.

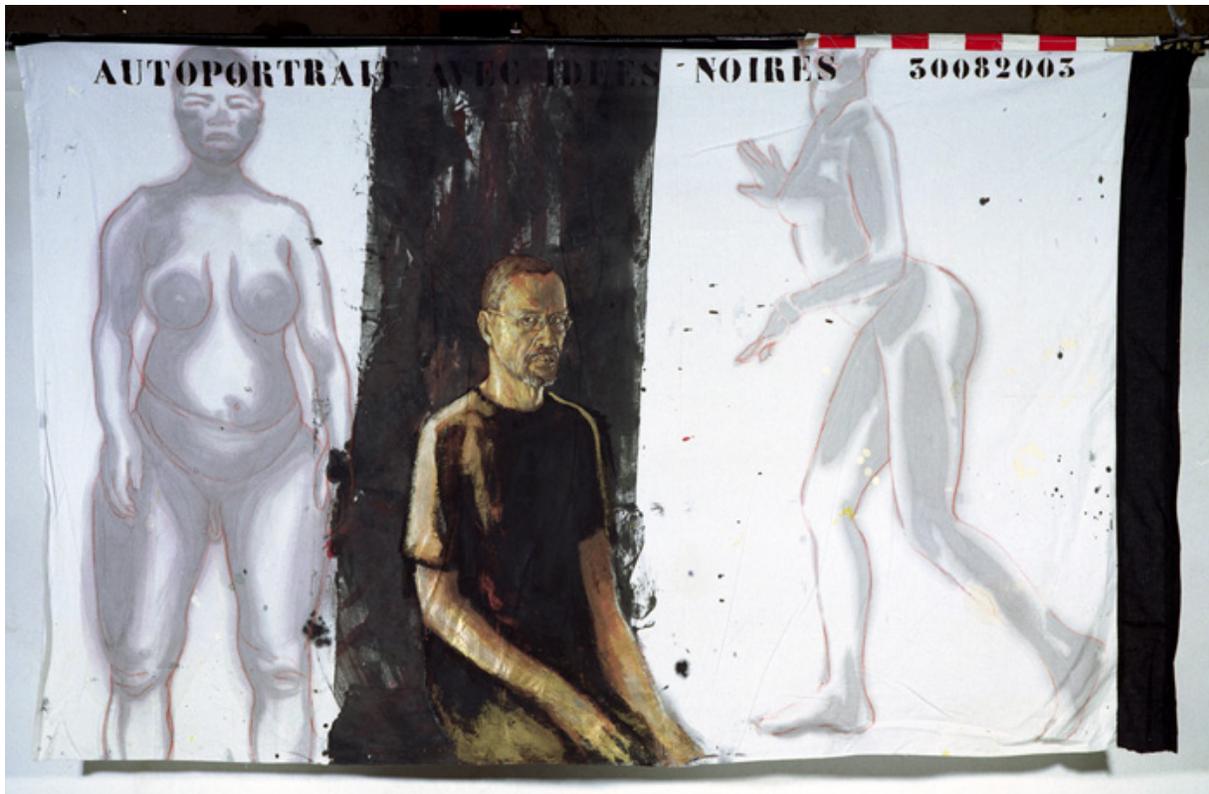


Figure 3.12: Hassan Musa, *Autoportrait Avec Idées Noires* (2003), 110.23 x 104 inches, textile paint on fabric, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3.13: Photograph of South African Ambassador Skweyiya accepting the human remains and plaster cast of Sara Baartman on behalf of South Africa from French Minister Roger-Gerard Schwartzberg, 2002.



Figure 3.14: Charles Williams, *Love and Beauty – Sartjee the Hottentot Venus* (1822), hand colored etching, 11.33 x 8.58 inches, The British Museum (London, Britain).



Figure 3.15: Stanislaus Walery, Josephine Baker in her banana skirt at the Folies Bergère production “Un Vent de Folie,” (ca. 1926).

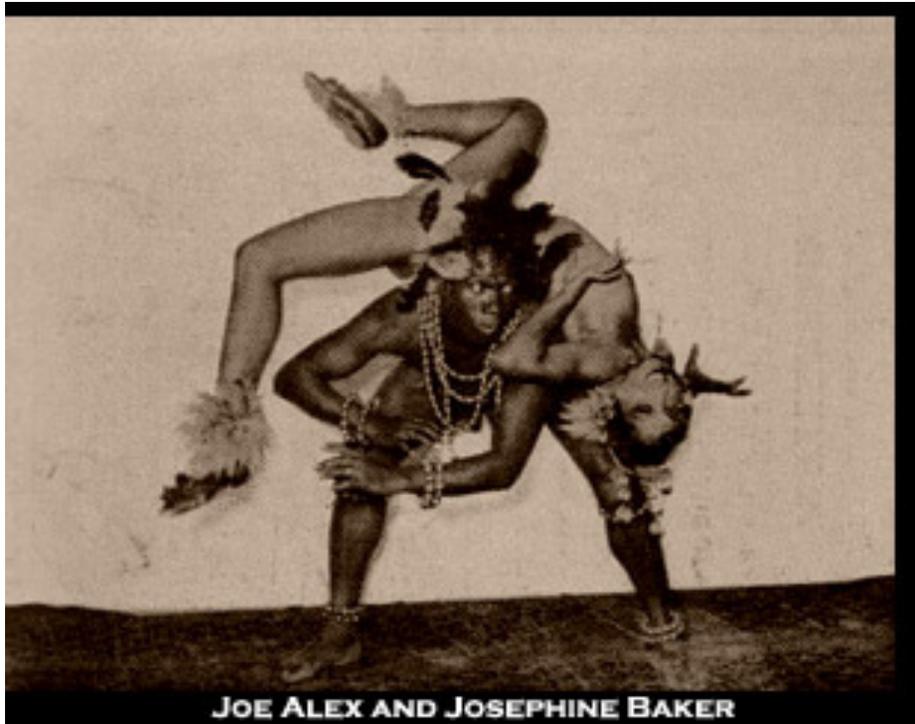


Figure 3.16: Josephine Baker and Joe Alex, opening night of *La Revue Nègre*, Theatre de Champs-Elysees, Paris, 1925. Published in André Levinson, *La Danse d'aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1929).



Figure 3.17: Paul Colin, *Josephine Baker (Banana Skirt)*, 1927, lithograph, 16.42 x 10.94 inches, Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery (Washington D.C., USA).



Figure 3.18: Hassan Musa, *The Art of Healing* (2002), 114.96 x 46.06 inches, textile paint on fabric, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3.19: Hassan Musa, *There are No Tigers in Africa* (2010), 66.92 x 92.91 inches, assembled fabric, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3.20: Eugène Delacroix, *Tiger Attacking an Indian Woman* (1856), oil on canvas, 20.08 x 24.02 inches, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (Stuttgart, Germany).



Figure 3.21: Eugène Delacroix, *Mulatto Woman* (1821), oil on canvas, 31.5 x 25.6 inches, Musée Fabre (Montpellier, France).



Figure 3.22: Eugène Delacroix, *Odalisque* (1857), oil on panel, 14 x 12 inches, Private Collection.



Figure 3.23: Eugène Delacroix, *The Abduction of Rebecca* (1846), oil on canvas, 39.37 x 32.28 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, New York, USA).

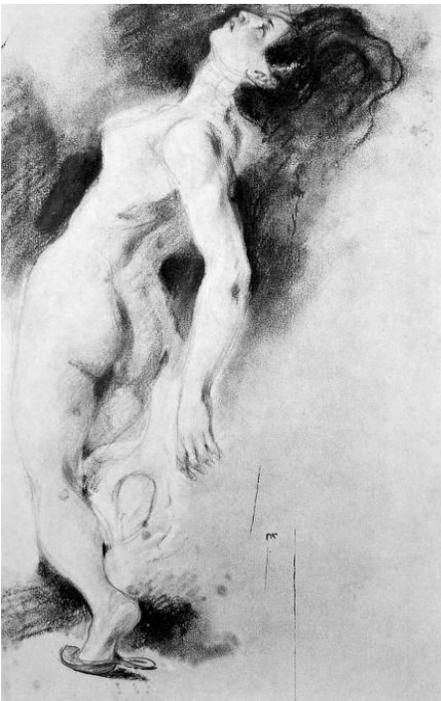


Figure 3.24: Eugène Delacroix, *Female Nude Killed From Behind* (1827), pastel, 16.14 x 11 inches, Musée du Louvre (Paris, France).



Figure 4.1: Robert Frank, *Parade - Hoboken, New Jersey* (1955), gelatin silver print, Museum of Modern Art (New York, New York, USA).



Mr Al-Ghoussein was a photo-journalist before he became an artist  
Figure 4.2: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Jebel Hussein Refugee Camp No. 8, Jordan* (1993), photograph, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.



<http://FUTURODELMUNDO.wordpress.com>

Figure 4.3: Laurent Rebours, Faris Odeh preparing to lodge a rock at an IDF tank, October 29, 2000, ©Laurent Rebours/AP.



Figure 4.4: Patrick Nagatani, *Alamogordo Blues* (1986), Polaroid Polacolor ER, Land Prints (Diffusion Transfer Prints), 24 x 40 inches (diptych), Collection of Center for Creative Photography.



Figure 4.5: Anonymous, *Observers, Operation Greenhouse* (1951), courtesy of the USA Department of Defense.



Figure 4.6: Patrick Nagatani, detail of *Alamogordo Blues* (1986), Polaroid Polacolor ER, Land Prints (Diffusion Transfer Prints), 24 x 40 inches (diptych), Collection of Center for Creative Photography.



Figure 4.7: Installation view of *Untitled (Self Portrait Series)* at Sharjah Biennial 6, 2003, ©Haupt & Binder.



Figure 4.8: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 5 (Self Portrait Series)* (2003), digital print, 21 5/8 x 29 1/2 inches, edition of 6, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.



Figure 4.9: Naji al-Ali, *Wanted*, published in Arjan El Fassed, Naji al-Ali: The Timeless conscience of Palestine, *The Electronic Intifada*, July 22, 2004, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/naji-al-ali-timeless-conscience-palestine/5166>, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4.10: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 1 (Self Portrait Series)* (2003), digital print, 21.65 x 29.5 inches, edition of 6, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.

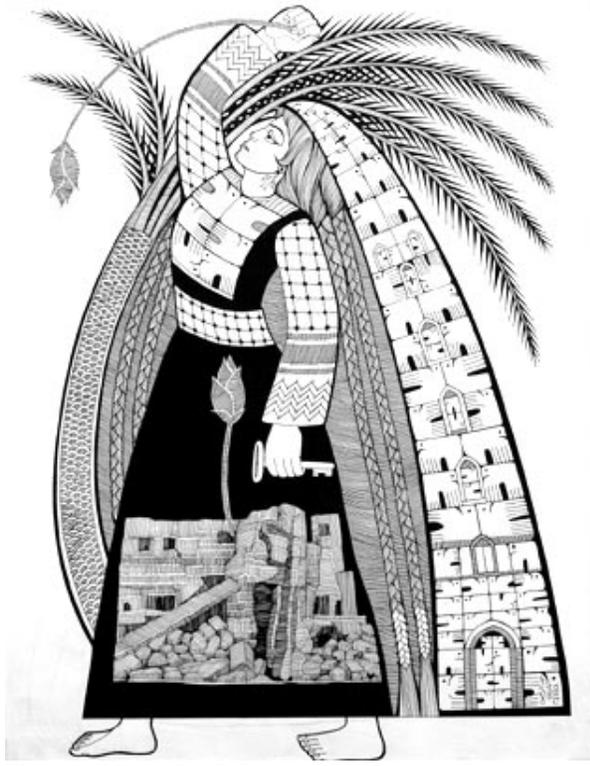


Figure 4.11: Abdul Rahman Al-Muzayen, from the series *Jenin* (2002), ink on paper, 25 x 19.5 inches, published in Tarif Abboushi, James Harithas and Tex Kerschen, *Made In Palestine* (Houston, TX: Ineri Publishers, 2003).



Figure 4.12: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 4 (Self Portrait Series)* (2003), digital print, 21.65 x 29.5 inches, edition of 6, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.



Figure 4.13: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 6 (Self Portrait Series)* (2003), digital print, 21.65 x 29.5 inches, edition of 6, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.



Figure 4.14: Photograph of Fateh Fedayeen at a rally in Beirut, Lebanon (1979).



Figure 4.15: Yasser Arafat with Nicolae Ceaușescu, Bucharest, Romania 1974.



Figure 4.16: Model Diego Lema wearing a *keffiyeh*, ©Diego Lema.



Figure 4.17: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 10 (B Series)* (2005), digital print, 21.65 x 29.5 inches, edition of 6, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.



Figure 4.18: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled (C Series)*, installation shot at *Scenes of the South*, Carré D'Art—Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes, France, 2008, ©David Huguenin.

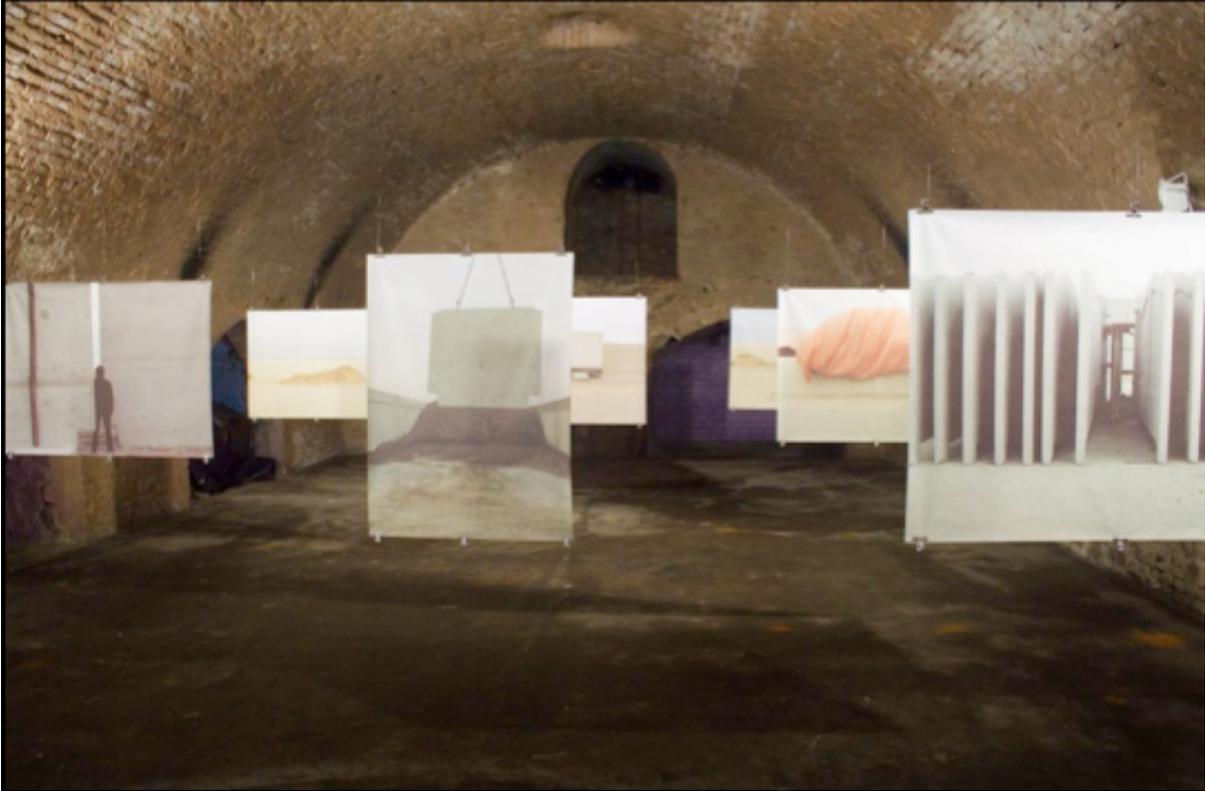


Figure 4.19: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled (B Series)*, installation shot at *Ideal City—Invisible Cities*, Zamość, Poland, 2006, courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4.20: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 11 (C Series)* (2007), digital print, 21.65 x 29.5 inches, edition of 6, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.



Figure 4.21: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 7 (C Series)* (2007), digital print, 21.65 x 29.5 inches, edition of 6, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.



Figure 4.22: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 9 (C Series)* (2007), digital print, 21.65 x 29.5 inches, edition of 6, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.



Figure 4.23: Tarek Al-Ghoussein, *Untitled 3 (C Series)* (2007), digital print, 21.65 x 29.5 inches, edition of 6, courtesy of the artist and The Third Line.