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## At MoMA, Walid Raad Is Our Caravaggio

THE DAILY PIC: Raad's newfangled truthiness was there in the Old Masters too.

Blake Gopnik (<https://news.artnet.com/about/blake-gopnik-86>), December 9, 2015



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**THE DAILY PIC** (#1450): The current [Walid Raad show at MoMA](http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1493?locale=en) (<http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1493?locale=en>) can seem full of tough and strange work, on the cutting edge of today's art – but it's also one of the most substantial shows on view right now in New York. The works in it are meant to feel like documentation of decades of troubles in Lebanon, but you're never sure what's real and what's imaginary.

Today's Pic is from a series of vintage photos that document a European tour taken in 1958 by a certain Dr. Fadl Fakhouri, described as one of Lebanon's great historians. He's a man traveling from the fabled (but now long-lost) "Paris of the Levant" to, well, the Paris of Paris. Because you know that Raad, like any artist (like any historian, for that matter) is perfectly likely to be fibbing, you aren't ever sure if Fakhouri existed, or if he ever took the trip, or if the photos are of someone else entirely from that era, or even if they are quite recent well-Photoshopped trickery.

This condition of utter doubt about what's what does seem particular to the Middle East – just look at Palestinian and Israeli versions of history and current affairs. But of course it's also in play everywhere else, at every moment – just look at Irish politics and history, or at Donald Trump's view of things. (No don't look at him; no point bringing lunatic liars into a discussion of truth.)

Thinking about the newfangledness of Raad's slide into truthiness, however, I suddenly realized that its confusions have in fact been there in all of realist art, from the moment the Renaissance gave birth to the form. We look at Old Master portraits and genre scenes as though they give access to the former presents they depict, but in fact they've always been at several removes from reality. Art's surfaces have often been truthful, but its depths – here Plato got it right – have always harbored lies.

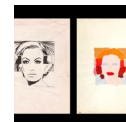
I think Raad's Lebanon is not that far at all from Caravaggio's biblical Holy Land (© 2015 Walid Raad, courtesy the artist and Paula

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