



Sky over London
19 April 2010

Achim Borchardt-Hume

One of the most striking differences between the early works of *The Atlas Group* and your more recent projects, especially *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World*, is the prominence of colour. Colour has, of course, always been a constant presence in your work. At times it is subtle and only hinted at as in the delicate annotations in *Notebook volume 72: Missing Lebanese wars (1989/1998)*, at others it rises to become the protagonist. In *Let's be honest, the weather helped (1998/2006-7)* the colour coding of the ammunition used to shell Beirut creates a rich pattern of chromatic dots that prevent the black-and-white images you took of the city at the height of the Lebanese civil wars from being easily consumed. The formalism of the abstract composition created by the dots is diametrically opposed to the documentary mode of the underlying photographs.

Blue, with its symbolism of promise (a bright blue sky on a sunny day), neutrality (the helmets of the NATO peace-keeping forces in the Middle East) and Romantic longing (Novalis' blue flower which despite endless searching can never be found), as much as its rich tradition in Western art (from the blue of the Virgin's cloak in medieval painting to Yves Klein's patented YKB blue) takes centre stage in *Secrets in the open sea (1994/2004)*. At the same time, the electric blue of one of the plates in particular is reminiscent of the techni-colour blue sky, whose terrifying beauty made news reports on the events of 9/11 all that bit more unsettling. (Curiously, when Mount Eyjafjallajökull erupted in April 2010 and all air traffic was banned across Europe, the sky over London once more appeared digitally blue which makes me wonder whether it is only by way of disasters, natural or man-made, that we can experience an undisturbed blue sky over our metropolis.)

Most recently, in *Appendix XVIII: Plates (2010)* of *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow*, you speculate about the rescue of colour for a Middle Eastern art that is yet to come. Colour, it is claimed in the narrative accompanying the work, will become available to artists from the future not by turning to artworks from the past but by paying careful attention to the ephemera that constitute the current infrastructure of modern art. The titles of this series of stridently colourful, large photographic plates allude to exhibition catalogues, letter heads, sales records, etc. How would you describe the role of colour within your practice?

Walid Raad

I.

Out of the blue...

Into the blue...

II.

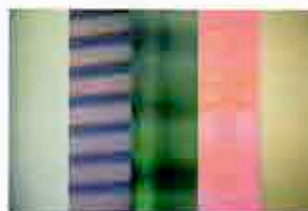
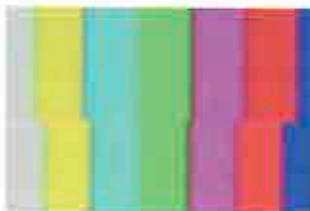
Notwithstanding that all my works are in colour, whether explicitly announced as made in colour or black-and-white, I have noticed that at times, especially in the video works, the frame is filled with a single colour or a band of colours.

For example, from *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (#17 and #31)_English Version* (2000) where the tape begins with a male voice-over in Arabic subtitled against a grey background:

- My name is Souheil Bachar.
- I am 35 years old.
- I was kidnapped in 1983. I was released in 1993.
- I am originally from the village of Houla in South Lebanon.
- Please translate what I say in Arabic in the following video segments into the official language of the country where the tapes are screening. English for the UK and the US, French for France, Arabic for the Arab world and so on.
- I also ask that you dub my voice with a neutral-toned female voice.
- Subtitle what I am currently saying. Let the subtitles appear on a grey background or if you prefer use a blue background. Blue just like the Mediterranean.



Also, from the same work:



And the following sequence where the colour red appears in the middle of Bachar's testimony about the homoerotic dimensions of his captivity:



In *We can make rain but no one came to ask* (2003/2006), towards the end of the tape, and just before a three-minute silent section that is constructed from the photographs of the photojournalist, Georges Semerdjian, taken on the site of a car bomb detonation on 21 January 1986, the following screen appears for several seconds:



The colours rarely erupt. They dissolve into and out of the frame, lasting just a few seconds.

III.

I cannot resist a 'blue screen' as well as when a video projector goes to blue in the absence of a video signal.

IV.

In the 1980s, when photographs were still processed chemically, I was fascinated by how photographic papers (whether black-and-white or colour) produced colours and tones, especially in the absence of a negative or an image. At the time, I also worked as a chemical mixing technician in the college I was attending in Rochester (New York, USA), and I spent months experimenting with the variables that affected the reproduction of colours and tones on photographic papers: exposure time; the enlarger bulb's colour temperature and age; the paper's expiration date as well as its humidity and temperature; the composition and temperature of the chemicals used, and so on. I ended up with hundreds of shades of grey, blue, red, each distinct from the other, and each the result of a particular cocktail of lights, emulsions, liquids and temperatures. I also remember that between such technical experiments, I took memorable trips to the George Eastman House where I saw prints by Eugène Atget, Berenice Abbott, Walker Evans, Gustave Le Gray, Man Ray, August Sander and Carleton Watkins, among others, and to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, where I viewed paintings by the likes of Barnett Newman, Helen Frankenthaler, Arshile Gorky, Morris Louis, Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, Frank Stella and Clyfford Still. All this, I should say, was unfolding during some of the worst



Clyfford Still
1957-D No. 7
1957

periods of the Lebanese civil wars, when I was on the phone to my family every day trying to figure out how they had dealt with the latest round of fighting.

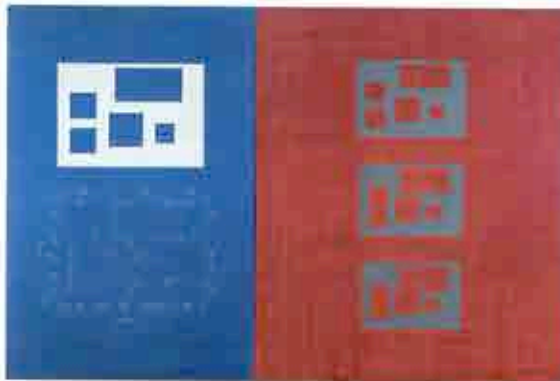
The encounters with the prints in the George Eastman House and the paintings in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and the daily phone calls to Beirut must have combined into a potent cocktail that, at the time, failed to blend smoothly with the chemical and optical experiments unfolding in my darkroom. For some time, the experiences sat one on top of the other, like oil on water. It took another fifteen years for the blend to mix in such works as *Secrets in the open sea* (1994/2004), *We decided to let them say, "we are convinced," twice* (2002/2006) and *Let's be honest, the weather helped* (1998/2006-7).

V.

Imagine the following scenario: an artist, renowned for her use of dazzling colours, decides for reasons that she cannot understand to narrow her palette to a single colour. Asked to explain why she uses only a single colour, blue, for example, the artist answers: 'blue is the only colour available to me today.' When presented with other pigments, other colours, the artist clarifies that she is quite aware of the physical availability of other colours. 'The other colours are not depleted materially, but immaterially withdrawn', she explains. This scenario would have been less imaginable (and even less livable) for me without Jalal Toufic's books and his concept of 'the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster.'¹

ABH Large expanses of a single colour, to some degree, always act as blank screens for the viewer's projection of her own interior world of associations and ideas. The large, often monochrome, plates of *Appendix XVIII: Plates in Scratching...* activate a similar dynamic with the caveat that the typographic detail relaying information about the colour's alleged origin acts as a barrier to a sense of visual abandon. This dynamic of drawing the viewer in (for instance, by way of constructing intriguing narratives as in the case of the *Fakhouri File*) ultimately to withhold resolution (as to the veracity of these narratives, for example) has been a constant in your work right from the beginning of *The Atlas Group*.

WR I rarely viewed the monochrome artworks I encountered as blank screens, but rather as much-too-filled surfaces. And it was always clear to me that they were not filled with my own projections, but rather with their own matter.



David Diao
The Rug, It Shrank!
2004-5

Sometimes they were filled with one colour; at other times, with too many colours (which may appear to some as a single colour, and to others as multiple colours); and yet at other times, with other elements, other than pigments and oils and water and canvas.

I occasionally also experienced the monochrome as a highly encrypted surface, filled with signs addressed to an unknown addressee. This may tangentially be linked to my experiences in Lebanon where a highly politicized and militarized space had given rise to numerous methods of dissimulation and encryption.

I don't necessarily feel that 'I draw a viewer in ultimately to withhold resolution'. My sense is that one logic of viewing is available on one level – we can call it the 'draw the viewer in' level; but what you refer to as 'ultimately withhold resolution' is but another logic of viewing with its own qualitatively distinct coordinates. The shift from one quality of coordinates to another can appear to some as 'withholding resolution.'

ABH Ever since Rodchenko's *Pure Red Colour*, *Pure Yellow Colour* and *Pure Blue Colour* (1921), the format of the monochrome has been employed to speculate about the limits of art, particularly painting and its continuous viability to act as an arena for the exploration of philosophical thought. Olivier Mosset, for instance, in his continuously evolving series of monochrome canvasses has pursued this question of the final boundary in the most uncompromising way. David Diao, a painter whose work you introduced me to, by combining monochrome colour fields with textual references hypothesizing about supposed benchmarks of artistic success also explores these issues, especially in relation to the so-called 'other'. Does your use of the monochrome also involve an element of the endgame – or perhaps, to look at it more optimistically – the endgame as the starting point for something new, especially as far as photography and its ongoing capacity to create images are concerned?

WR I have rarely made an image that consisted of a single colour. *Secrets in the open sea* consists of the large blue field, but also of the white border around it, the small black-and-white images on the bottom right, as well as the small texts that function as captions inside the plate. Similarly, the large plates from *Appendix XVIII: Plates* include for the most part more than one colour as well as some letters, words, forms and lines. But these colours, lines and forms are all 'on loan' from

various documents. My approach here is similar to that of some documentary photographers; I produce an image by 'borrowing' historical facts.

For example, the colour that appears as yellow in *Plate 103: A History of a Title* is 'on loan' from the cover of a decades-old art historical book in Arabic. In the plate, the colour does not reference the book, and my accompanying caption does not mention the origin of the text, lines and colours that are presented. In my plate, the colour 'simply' manages to be a colour. And moreover, it is unclear to me whether this colour will ever reference the book from which it originates. It may continue to reference 'yellow'; or it may some day reference another colour, let's say 'green'; or it may physically morph into another colour; or it may shed its skin and reveal yet another colour behind 'yellow'. My sense is that I am documenting a colour that is not yet available as a referential, documentary piece 'with the concomitant risk that facets relating to the subject matter might be mistaken for purely formal ones'.² As such, I don't find myself at an endgame, but rather at the very beginning of a process that will last for a while and will be full of uncertainty. Another way for me to describe this would be to say that by documenting this colour, I feel that I became the recipient of a letter that I am meant to safeguard for a future addressee. The same goes for all of the lines, shapes and forms that appear as images and words in the same series. It may very well be that what appears as the letter 'P' in the words that spell the phrase 'post-war contemporary art in Lebanon' in *Plate 103* is but a line whose shape is all-too-often confused for a 'P'. This confusion is not an obstacle to be overcome. Rather, it is central for the survival and possible availability of this line to artists in the future.

ABH Much of your work creates a very direct encounter with the viewer, the intensity of which it is easy to underestimate when one comes across your work in less immediate contexts such as magazine articles, exhibition catalogues or online. Your use of scale is especially skillful. The lined-up images of *Appendix XVIII: Plates or Secrets in the open sea*, for instance, envelop the viewer generating an intuitive response that precedes the cerebral act of seeking to understand the intellectual motivations underpinning the work. In others, you use a focus on detail to draw the viewer right into the picture. *My neck is thinner than a hair: Engines* (2001/2003) or "*Oh God," he said, talking to a tree* (2004/2008) are prime examples of this strategy. How do you view the correlation between the experiential, aesthetic, conceptual – and, ultimately, political – dimensions of your work?

WR I.

The Atlas Group, *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* and possibly even *Sweet Talk: Commissions (Beirut)* (1987–present) are created with the assumption that they will have multiple formats: framed or unframed prints; projected images and sounds, and published documents (print and/or web). The works are also created with the assumption that they will be presented as installations in museums, galleries and exhibition halls; as script and slides for lectures and performances in black-box theatres, performance spaces, classrooms, lecture halls and community centres; and as pages for books, be it artist books, image-text essays published in academic and non-academic journals, on the web, in magazines, newspapers or

catalogues. The different formats at times intensify and at other times dilute certain qualities in the work. Most of the concepts, experiences and experiments that motivate my artworks appear to me to be quite elastic in the sense that they are not necessarily attached to specific media and specific forms, lines, colours and shapes. *Notebook volume 72: Missing Lebanese wars* exists as digital files projected in the multimedia lecture/performance *The Loudest Muttering is Over*; as framed prints exhibited as part of *The Fakhouri File*; and as plates reproduced in journals and books such as *The Atlas Group Archive: Volume 1*.³ In such cases, I am as committed to the image that appears on a computer monitor or is projected, as I am to the one that I print and frame, as I am to the one that I place in a page layout to be viewed in a hand-held volume.

II.

It is difficult enough for me to define the physical limits of some of my works, let alone trying to parse the works into their experiential, aesthetic, conceptual, political, technical, critical, personal and historical aspects. All these exist on a continuum, a defining correlation as you write in your question. If and when I am working on an exhibition of *The Atlas Group*, for example, I try to approach the exhibition as a whole, as one installation. I treat many elements inside and outside the exhibition space as part and parcel of the artwork: from the printed or projected image to the frame, colour of the walls, captions and wall texts; from the lights, walls, floor and ceiling, security guards, docents, catalogue, press releases, newsletters, public displays and signs, curator or director statements, logos and entrance tickets to any interviews or conversations I am asked to conduct with journalists, students or the general public, and so on and so on.⁴ The same goes for the performances and lectures attached to *The Atlas Group* where I find myself quite sensitive to elements such as the lectern and table, chair and stool, bottle and glass of water, size and quality of the projected image; the position and sound of the projector in the room; the peripheral objects that are always in university lecture halls, from the abused overhead projector whose electrical cord is badly coiled, to the blackboard on which some disgruntled student expresses his/her rage at this or that professor, fellow student or concept; to the orphaned chairs that are out of sorts with the others in the room. I am equally sensitive to the kind of technical or other difficulty that will inevitably interrupt the presentation; to the question and answer session that will follow; to the few seconds of awkward silence that follow a speaker's 'we have time for some questions if there are any'; to the more or less informal conversations that the speaker will have with members of the audience after the presentation, and at the dinner or lunch that follows with those who invited him/her. It may well be that only *The Atlas Group*, a project that also unfolds in fiction, requires this kind of fluidity whereas the outlines of *Sweet Talk: Commissions (Beirut)*, which I am working on for this exhibition, may be more rigid.

ABH You are very well versed in the history of photography and keenly aware of conventions of image-making that have evolved over long periods of time. Earlier you mentioned August Sander, whose *People of the Twentieth Century* remains the archetypal 'atlas' coolly recording a society in upheaval, and it was



August Sander
Farm Children
1931

a catalogue of photographs by Walker Evans which provided the template for the formal composition of *Sweet Talk: Commissions (Beirut)*. Earlier, you mentioned your pleasure in producing seemingly photographic images without actually using a negative and your delight in the sheer materiality of the photographic image.

You frequently play with the conventions of abstraction and representation, and their distinct histories within twentieth-century modernism. I have often wondered whether, rather than fact and fiction, the terms representation and abstraction might not be more adequate to define the dynamic poles in your work.

To me, it is curious that this polarity between abstraction and representation, and the blurring of their presumed boundaries, seems to have been a primary concern especially for artists who either witnessed or worked in the direct aftermath of great historical crises which resisted a single authoritative account. Monet, for instance, painted his late water lilies, which dissolve recognizable space into a destabilizing mass of brush strokes, after the trench warfare of World War I had irrevocably transformed our collective understanding of landscape. Beforehand, you mentioned seeing paintings by Newman, Pollock and Rothko while getting first-hand reports on the wars in Lebanon from your family. Abstract Expressionism, of course, to a large degree also evolved in response to the humanist disaster of World War II and the Holocaust. Rothko, for one, never saw himself as an abstract artist, but was insistent that he was a figurative painter representing the drama of human existence. Some of the most important artists of our times, such as Gerhard Richter, have also rejected the idea of abstraction and representation as mutually exclusive, treating them instead as the two faces of the same coin. Curiously, Richter, once again, formulated his position within the context of a traumatic historical situation, namely that of post-World War II Germany.

The same dynamic of representation and abstraction as it plays itself out in late modernist art, in my view, also applies to the concept of history and its documentation. Historic narratives, it could be argued, always rely on a process of abstraction from the specific accounts of individual experience; that is a process of abstraction which paradoxically is possible only by using strategies of representation. Schools in Lebanon can teach history only up to the country's independence in 1943 after which there is no consensus on the sequence of events which makes attempts by writers and artists to come to terms with the country's recent history all the more prescient. My question thus is whether you think that



Gerhard Richter
Tote
1986

the specifics of the historic situation in Lebanon, i.e., the civil wars and their legacy, may have both enabled and conditioned a new approach to image-making?

WR I quote at length here from Jalal Toufic's 'To Remember or Not to Remember – That is Not a Question', taken from his *Undeserving Lebanon*.⁵

Against the prevalent post-traumatic amnesia encountered in post-war Lebanon, and which is exemplified by the unjust and scandalous general amnesty law that was passed by parliament on 28 March 1991 (Law No. 84/91) and that pardoned all political crimes prior to its enactment with the exclusion of 'crimes of assassination or attempted assassination of religious figures, political leaders, and foreign or Arab diplomats,' writers and filmmakers should have devised affirmative scenarios and strategies either to remember or not to remember:

– Not to remember – without forgetting. He could no longer stand their post-traumatic amnesia and so he volunteered for one of the first time-travel experiments, in order to travel to a different branch of the multiverse where 'they' (actually another version of them) remember neither him nor the civil war and the Israeli invasions not because 'they' have forgotten them, but because 'they' did not undergo a civil war and invasions and because 'they' never met him before, i.e., he time-traveled in part to have 'them' not remember him without 'their' having forgotten him, that is to divest not remembering from forgetting (this is one of the rigorous ways of viewing Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad*, where the man remembers a woman who does not remember [meeting] him [the previous year at Marienbad]). To my knowledge, the Lebanese have not made time-travel films and videos – nor have they made films and videos exploring post-war Lebanon's labyrinthine ruins, 'in' which notwithstanding coming across some photographs or a video showing one in the ruin, one may not remember ever being there – not because one has forgotten visiting the ruin, but because while prior to entering the labyrinth you have not been there previously, 'the moment you enter the labyrinth, you've been there before'.⁶

– To remember: As the reader can recall, to my knowledge, the Lebanese have not made films and videos exploring post-war Lebanon's labyrinthine ruins, which make possible the following preternaturalness: notwithstanding

being certain that it is the first time I am entering the ruin, I remember at times what is at a particular spot in it.

While in Lebanon the majority of artists and writers decry the post-traumatic amnesia in the period that followed the civil war and the war, most of them are oblivious of a major event in terms of memory, 'Āshūrā', the yearly commemoration by the Twelver Shi'ite community of the slaughter of Imām Husayn and seventy-two of his companions in 680 – this obliviousness is a symptom of the continued bigotry of a majority of the other Lebanese and Arabs toward Shi'ites.⁷ In Lebanon, the amnesia is mainly directed toward the recent, traumatic past, specifically the protracted civil war and the two Israeli invasions; while the memory is directed toward the future, toward a messianic promise (cf. both my video *Āshūrā: This Blood Spilled in My Veins*, 2002, and my 2005 book with the same title).⁸

You asked whether 'the civil wars and their legacy have both enabled and conditioned a new approach to image-making'? I answer that the protracted civil war in part produced a writer, Jalal Toufic, who has written that Lebanese artists have not divested 'not remembering from forgetting', and have not made artworks, films and videos that devise 'affirmative scenarios and strategies either to remember or not to remember'; and who has also written that Lebanese artists have not made films and videos that explore 'post-war Lebanon's labyrinthine ruins'. It seems that one of the consequences of the protracted civil war has been a writer, whose books matter very much to me; a writer, who writes about what Lebanese artists have failed to do in the opening paragraphs of his book titled *Undeserving Lebanon*.⁹

ABH You mentioned Jalal Toufic before, particularly the importance that his concept of 'the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster' holds for you. And just now you mention a concept of time – of event in relation to its taking place, its consequences informing the future and it being remembered as the past – that sharply contradicts the way time is commonly presented as linear. The relationship between present and past, between memory and how this informs our thinking about the future, is also central to the workings of the museum. As a repository of culture the museum acts as a container for our historical subconscious which by way of looking at specific objects is being made once more concrete. In the West, for instance, we still reel from the damages inflicted by two major wars and a mass-genocide, even though late capitalism's economy of pleasure and its promotion of a perpetual present is trying its best to make us forget about this. Museums are places where such suppressed – or perhaps more accurately, such unreachable – memories once more rise to the surface of our consciousness. They are places that consistently point to the gaps, to the moments where those ill at ease with the status quo by asking the pertinent questions of the moment opened a critical space that eventually enabled us to rethink where to go from here.

Especially in your more recent work the museum appears to become an ever more important reference point. *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* is underpinned by your research into the current boom of museum-building in the Gulf Region, in particular the hunger for franchizing museums with a



Marcel Duchamp
Boite-en-valise
1935-41

strong brand value such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum or the Louvre. You make this especially explicit in your lecture and walk-through accompanying this project and in the ambitious theatre performance you will first present at Le CENTQUATRE. At the centre of *Scratching...* is a miniature retrospective of the complete works of *The Atlas Group*. This 'model' – although it is precisely not a model as it does not pre-figure the work of *The Atlas Group* but comes after it – is not dissimilar to Marcel Duchamp's famous *Boite-en-valise* (1935-41). Re-making his most iconic works including *Large Glass* and *Fountain* on a much reduced scale allowed Duchamp, also a migrant artist who left his native France for the US, to take his work with him; albeit, just as in your case, in a way that was more notional rather than actual. The play with scale both underscored the works' conceptual strength as much as, paradoxically, the ways in which this was tied to a distinct materiality. (The miniature urinal representing *Fountain*, for example, was meticulously crafted and one of Duchamp's most treasured possessions. There is a similar fascination with the notion of making in your model.)

Our exhibition concludes with the spectacular projection of an imaginary architecture for a future museum, yet to be built, to house a Middle Eastern art, yet to be made. How do you relate to the museum and the place it occupies within the continuously fluctuating geography of past, present and future?

WR I.

First, some dumb facts and some remarks about what is unfolding in the Arabian/Persian Gulf today:

During the past decade, I have become fascinated by – and skeptical about – the emergence of a new infrastructure for the arts in the form of arts festivals, forums and workshops, museums, galleries, funds, prizes, foundations, catalogues, schools and journals in such cities as Abu Dhabi, Amman, Beirut, Cairo, Damascus, Doha, Dubai, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Ramallah and Sharjah. It seems to me that we are witnessing an acceleration in the pace of the making of Arab artists, Arab and Middle Eastern contemporary art, its genres, genealogies and histories. Of course, this infrastructure did not sprout from infertile ground and out of nothing. While white cube galleries are more or less new to Arab cities, other forms – be it foundations, collectives, museums, galleries, collections, magazines, journals or schools – have historical precedents which this new infrastructure at



The proposed cultural district at Saadiyat Island
Abu Dhabi
2010

times leans on, sometimes breaks with, and at others simply overlooks. It is also clear to me that the development of this new infrastructure is linked to a broader economic trend whereby cultural tourism figures more and more as an engine of economic growth.

On the cultural front, I am still struck by events in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), particularly in Abu Dhabi. Over the past few years, Abu Dhabi has also been diversifying its hydro-carbon dominated economy. It has invested heavily in aerospace, health care, biomedical technology, education, semiconductor and chip manufacturing, finance and, as you probably already know, in culture and the arts.

The main investment in culture and the arts is the well-publicized Saadiyat Island – a 27 square kilometer, \$27 billion project that will include the largest-to-date Guggenheim Museum to be designed by Frank Gehry, a subsidiary of the Louvre designed by Jean Nouvel and a Sheikh Zayed National Museum conceived by Foster and Partners. The Saadiyat project will also host a Maritime Museum by Tadao Ando, a performing arts center by Zaha Hadid, a few marinas, seven star hotels, restaurants, golf courses and so on.

But it is also important to note that Abu Dhabi is not just hiring 'starchitects' to build cultural Meccas and filling them with hi-end market-tested Western, Arab, Turkish, Indian and Iranian art in the hope that this alone will attract millions of tourists to the emirate. Abu Dhabi plans an infrastructure that will also include universities and colleges, art magazines, art journals, art prizes, art foundations; private and public Islamic, Western, Eastern, ancient, modern and contemporary art collections, art handlers, art insurers, writers, critics, galleries, patrons, collectors, archives, libraries, printers, framers, and so on, and so on. I even met someone who had been charged with designing Abu Dhabi's alternative arts scene.

This, I must say, is all fascinating.

And it seems to me that variations of this phenomenon are being planned in other countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Western Asia. In the Arabian Gulf, Qatar's efforts were most visible recently with the opening of its Museum of Islamic Arts, the I.M. Pei building that opened in November 2008. Of course, it is quite clear that few other states in the world have the resources of Abu Dhabi and Qatar. Still, Abu Dhabi's investment in culture and the arts is resonating in ways that have yet to crystallize.

II.

At the opening of a new museum of modern and/or contemporary Arab art in an Arab city, a proud local resident rushes to the entrance only to find that he is unable to proceed. Was it the thugs that shielded the ruling dynasty (attending the event en masse along with their newly contracted western and eastern celebrity-friends, to showcase their benevolence and refined sensibilities, pubescent-future-rulers in tow) that prevent his access? No. Was it his casual wear at an event announced as a black-tie affair? No. He simply feels that were he to walk in, he will certainly 'hit a wall.' On the spot, he turns to face the rushing crowd and screams: 'Stop. Don't go in. Be careful.' Within seconds, he is removed from the site, severely beaten and sent to a psychiatric facility.

My sense is that a similar event will unfold sometime between 2014 and 2024 in Beirut and/or Amman and/or Abu Dhabi and/or Doha and/or elsewhere in the region. We may even read in newspapers the following day the headline: 'Demented Man Disturbs Opening: Claims World Is Flat.' Consequently, an opening in the world will have been disturbed in more ways than anticipated.

1. Jalal Toufic, 'The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster' in Walid Raad and Jalal Toufic, *Scratching on Things I Could Destroy: A History of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Arab World/ Part 1, Volume 1, Chapter 1 (Beirut: 1992-2005)* (Los Angeles: California Institute of the Arts/ REDCAT, 2009).
2. *Ibid.*, p.38.
3. Walid Raad, *Volume 1: The Truth will be Known when the Last Witness is Dead: Documents in the Fakhouri File in The Atlas Group Archive* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2004).
4. Needless to say, there are always limits to what an artist can 'work' with during an exhibition, and this attitude to treat the exhibition as an installation-of-a-whole remains for me unrealized.
5. Jalal Toufic, *Undeserving Lebanon*, 2007. PDF available at <http://www.jalaltoufic.com/publications.htm>
6. Jalal Toufic, 'Transit Visa to the Labyrinth', in *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*, revised and expanded edition (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2003), p.86.
7. The Twelver Shi'ite saying *Es-sayday is 'Ashūrā'*, *every land is Karbalā'* should imply that the event 'Ashūrā' in Karbalā' ought not be restricted to Shi'ites. Many Shi'ite lamentations, implorations and invocations dealing with 'Ashūrā' should influence the music, performance, literature and philosophy of the other Lebanese and Arabs as well as of the world at large. That this has not yet happened is a regrettable symptom of the continued prejudice against Shi'ites.
8. This memory concerning an event that happened over a millennium ago may itself *partly* be a way to forget the civil war that ended only fifteen years ago.
9. It is important to note that Toufic has written extensively about Lebanese artists and artworks in almost all of his books. Some of his books are available as downloadable PDFs on his website <http://www.jalaltoufic.com>