

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Press release

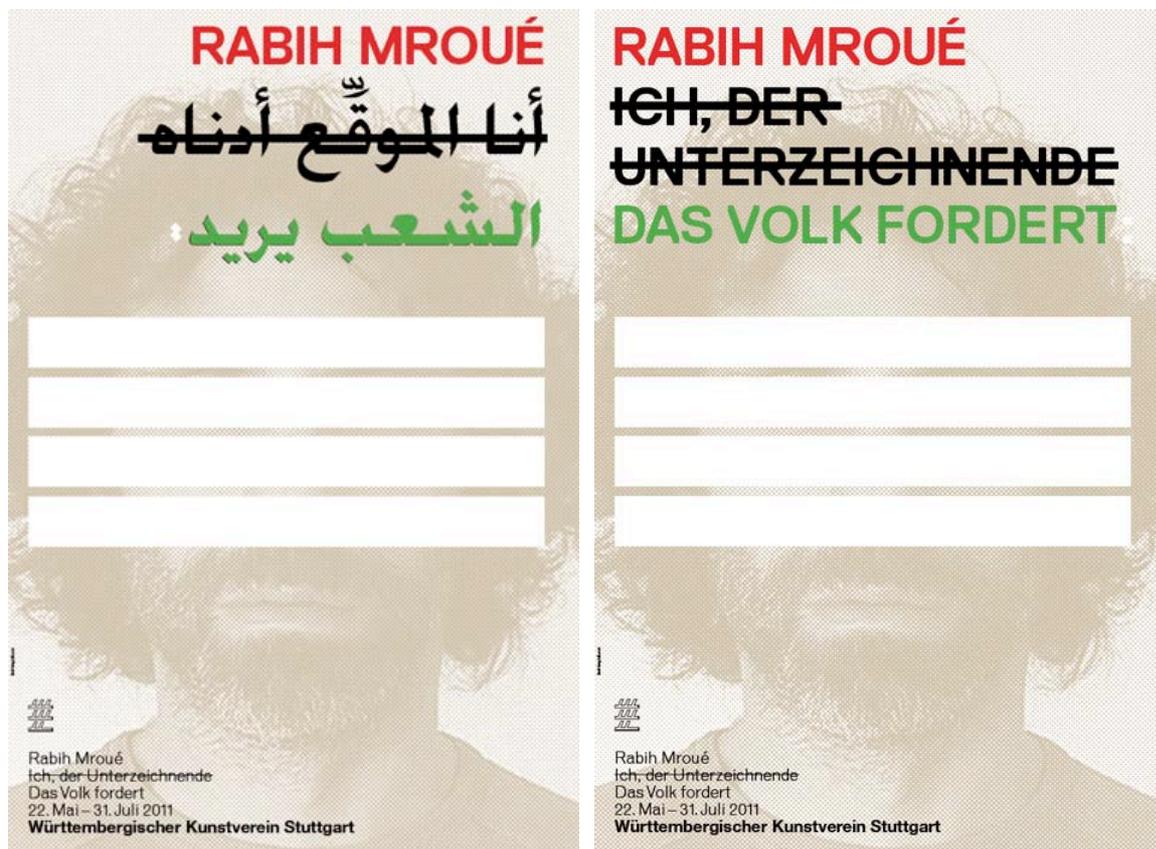


Rabih Mroué

~~I, the Undersigned~~ The People Are Demanding

May 22 – July 31, 2011

Press conference: Friday, May 20, 2011, 2 p.m.



An exhibition by

BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht

In collaboration with

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Curator

Cosmin Costinaş

1. Introduction

From May 22 to July 31, 2011 the Württembergischer Kunstverein is presenting the first solo exhibition by Lebanese artist Rabih Mroué to be held in Germany. The exhibition is curated by Cosmin Costinaş, curator of BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht, where the exhibition was first on show in 2010.

Mroué, who works within the spheres of theater, performance, and the visual arts, counts among the key figures of the Lebanese art scene established after the (formal) end of the civil war in the nineteen-nineties.

Against the backdrop of the ongoing Arab Revolution, the artist erased and replaced the original exhibition title, *I, the Undersigned*—which referred to an older work by Mroué—in terms of a radical reformulation of the presentation in Utrecht.

The new title, ~~*I, the Undersigned*~~ ***The People Are Demanding***, takes up the slogan lending wings to the people's uprisings in North Africa, the impact of which is at present nearly impossible to gauge. Again, *The People Are Demanding* is the title of the artist's most recent work, which is comprised of a wall text supplementing this sentence fragment with a selection of possible—and at the same time contradictory—demands. *The People Are Demanding* acknowledges the extraordinary revival of a sense of popular unity and action but also comments on the fragility of subjectivity in this context.

The erasure in the title finds its correspondence in the exhibition where the work *I, the Undersigned* (2007) has been removed, only traces of it remaining visible to the public. Originally, it contained the artist's striking apology for his part in the Lebanese civil war. However, during these days of revolutionary upheaval—with the masses coming together for (temporary) common purposes—the artist considers the subjective "I" to be suspended, half-voluntarily, half under an accepted pressure.

In his works, Mroué investigates enduring conflicts which have played out in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon. The political and cultural contexts of these conflicts are spotlighted, as are more general questions concerning the construction of identity, history, and memory.

Mroué's works, which are based on documents (newspaper clippings, found photos videos, et cetera) from his comprehensive archive, sedulously traverse the boundaries between fiction and reality. They interleave "facts" from the past with speculation about the present, and individual experiences with those of the collective. Here Mroué is focused less on remembering than on forgetting—an act of forgetting in the sense of an active process of coming to terms with the past.

For the Stuttgart exhibition comprising works from 2003 till 2011 an individual stage-like architecture has been developed in close collaboration with the artist.

2. Works in the exhibition

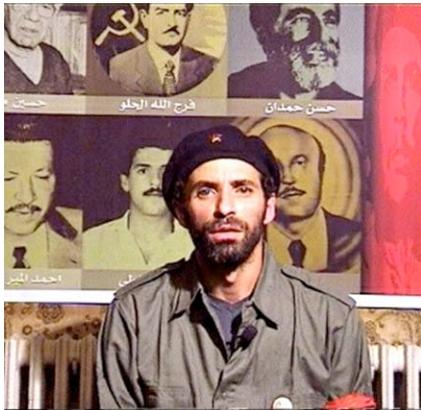
Old House, 2003

Video, 1:15 min., loop

The video work *Old House* shows the demolition of a house in Lebanon in slow motion. The images in the video run forward and backward at different rhythms. Here the irreversibility of the destruction and the possibility of renewal are permanently conjoined.

On Three Posters: Reflections on a Video-performance by Rabih Mroué, 2004

Video, 17 min.



On Three Posters: Reflections on a Video-performance by Rabih Mroué is a performance by the artist that has been transferred to video format—a kind of meta-narrative on the same. It is based on various test recordings of a video message made by one of the first suicide bombers in Lebanon—a worldly warrior who had fought against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon in 1985—shortly before his lethal act. Mroué's interest lies in the mediatic construction of this public confession. The original performance was created in 2000 together with Elias Khoury.

With Soul, with Blood, 2006

Video, 11:00 min.

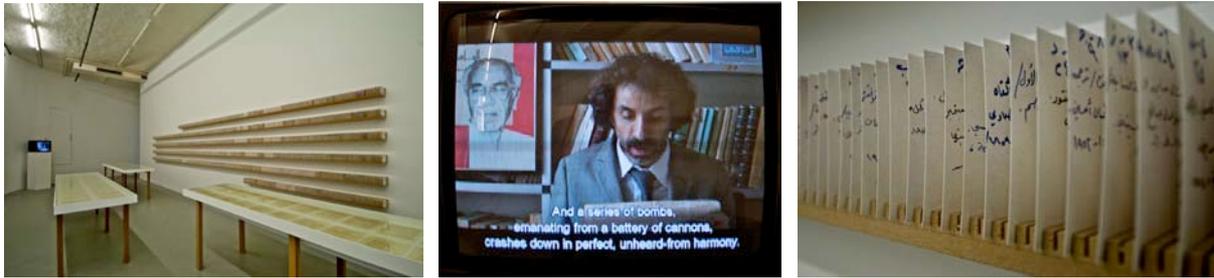
Noiseless, 2008

Installation (Text; Video, 04:30 min.)

In *Noiseless* the artist inserts his own image into newspaper clippings of missing persons announcements, by which these notices regain personal gravity and are brought into another regime of visibility.

Grandfather, Father and Son, 2010

Installation (mixed media), produced by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht



Exhibition view, Basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht

The installation *Grandfather, Father and Son* associates events from Mroué's family background with key historical moments in Lebanon. It comprises various documents pertaining to the artist, his father, and his grandfather, for instance cards from his grandfather's library. Mroué's grandfather, a theologian and communist, had written a book about the dialectics of Islam. In 1987, around the time the third volume of this work was being started, he was the victim of a bombing attack. This was the same year in which Prime Minister Rashid Karami was assassinated. Included in the installation are manuscript pages on a never-published mathematical treatise written by Mroué's father in 1982—the year in which Israeli soldiers marched into Lebanon and sparked the civil war. Mroué himself is represented by his first and last short story to date, which he published in 1989 toward the end of the conflict. In a video which was recorded in his grandfather's library, the artist recites the story.

Je Veux Voir, 2010

Installation (photomontage, two videos, text, 5:13 min. and 00:30 min., loop), produced by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht



Exhibition view, Basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht

The installation *Je Veux Voir* (I Want to See) harks back to the eponymous film by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige (2008) in which Mroué, together with Catherine Deneuve, plays the lead role. In this fictive film, which is in part based on a true story, Deneuve (played by Deneuve) inspects the aftermath of the Israeli attack on southern Lebanon in the year 2007. She is accompanied by Mroué (played by Mroué) who encounters his town of birth for the first time after the onslaught. The installation is made up of a large panorama photo showing Mroué's destroyed native village. Placed to the left and right of this photograph are two monitors. One presents a short sequence from the film in which Deneuve is calling Mroué's name at this eerie location. The other monitor shows mysterious military numerical codes written along the walls of the destroyed village houses.

I, the Undersigned: I and We, 2011

Installation (text, two videos, 4:10 min. and 3:50 min.)

I, the Undersigned from 2007—which will be presented in Stuttgart in an erased way—involves a wall text and a video work presented on two monitors. The lower monitor shows Mroué's unmoved face. Sounding from the off is a monotone voice reciting a sequence of apologies by the artist in Arabic language. The translation can be read on the upper monitor. Mroué is apologizing for personal conduct that he believes has (inadvertently) contributed to the continuation of the Lebanese Civil War. *I, the Undersigned: I and We* from 2011 in contrast consists of the two monitors *not* showing the videos and a text explaining this gesture of erasure.

The People Are Demanding, 2011

Wall text

"The people are demanding" are the first words of the main slogan being heard on the streets in the ongoing Arab Revolution, having started from the unambiguous "The people are demanding the fall of the regime" to different other versions, incorporating shifting sets of demands: "The people are demanding the resignation of the prime-minister," "the people are demanding immediate elections," "the people are demanding the hanging of the king," et cetera. In his work, Mroué completes the main subject and verb of this slogan with a long series of one verb demands that range from the most radical ones to the most mundane and basic human actions and desires. This twist reveals the ambivalence that is to be found in the work—as well as in the alteration of the title of the exhibition—both acknowledging the extraordinary revival of a sense of popular unity and action but also commenting on the fragility of subjectivity under the pressure of the unleashed forces of history and on the dangers of the totalizing "people."

Model of The Mediterranean Sea, 2011

Video installation

The work *The Mediterranean Sea* has been produced by Lunds Konsthall, Sweden

3. Short Biography

Rabih Mroué, born 1967, lives and works in Beirut

Mroué is an actor, director, playwright, visual artist, and a contributing editor for *The Drama Review* (TDR). He is also a co-founder and a board member of the Beirut Art Center (BAC), Beirut. In 2010 Mroué was awarded an Artist Grant for Theatre/Performance Arts from the Foundation of Contemporary Arts, New York and the Spalding Gray Award.

Recent exhibitions:

Performa 09, New York, 2009; 11th International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, 2009; *Tarjama/Translation*, Queens Museum of Art, New York, 2009; Sjarjah Biennial, Sjarjah, 2009; *Soft Manipulation – Who is afraid of the new now?*, Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 2008; *Medium Religion*, Center for Art and Media (ZKM), Karlsruhe, 2008; Manifesta 7, 2008, Fortezza/Franzenfeste, Bolzano/Bozen, Trento, Rovereto, 2008; *Les Inquiets. 5 artistes sous la pression de la guerre*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2008; *In Focus*, Tate Modern, London, 2007; and Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, 2006.

4. Rabih Mroué
I, the Undersigned The People Are Demanding
May 22–July 31, 2011

Press conference
Friday, May 20, 2011, 2 p.m.

Press release and press images
<http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/press>

Press contact
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Tel: +49 (0)711–22 33 711

Opening
Saturday, May 21, 2011, 7 p.m.

Artist talk
with Rabih Mroué and Cosmin Costinaş
Sunday, May 22, 2011, 11 a.m.

Exhibitions tours
With Hans D. Christ / Iris Dressler
Wednesday, June 15, 2011, 6:30 p.m.
Wednesday, July 6, 2011, 6:30 p.m.
Sunday, July 31, 2011, 4:30 p.m.

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Curator
Cosmin Costinaş

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Hours
Tue, Thu–Sun: 11 a.m.–6 p.m.; Wed: 11 a.m.–8 p.m.

Entrance fees
5 euros / 3 euros (reduced)

5. Materials

Rabih Mroué, *Old House*, 2003

Video, 01:15 min., Loop

Script

I am not telling in order to remember. On the contrary, I am doing so to make sure that I've forgotten. Or at least, to make sure that I've forgotten some things, that they were erased from my memory. When I am certain that I've forgotten, I attempt to remember what it is that I've forgotten. And while attempting to remember, I start guessing and saying: perhaps, maybe, it's possible, it might be, probably, it can be, it looks like, it seems that, I am not sure but, etc... This way I reinvent what I had forgotten on the basis that I have in fact remembered it. After an indefinite while, I retell it. Not to remember it, no, but to make sure that I've forgotten it, or at least parts of it, and so on and so forth.

This operation might appear repetitive, but it is the contrary, because it is a refusal to go back to the beginnings, and what know you of beginnings? This way I keep oscillating between remembering and forgetting, remembering and forgetting, remembering and forgetting, till death comes. I am betting on death to make me rediscover everything anew. Even if it happens that there will be nothing new; that will be in itself a discovery.

Rabih Mroué, *On Three Posters. Reflections on a Video-performance by Rabih Mroué*, 2004

Video, 17:00 min.

The original performance was realized in 2000 in collaboration with Elias Khoury.

Produced by Ayloul Festival, Beirut

Script

Ladies and gentlemen, good evening...

Thank you for attending this session. And happy to be with you here in this room.

Three Posters is a video-performance conceived and performed by Elias Khoury and Rabih Mroué and first performed at the Ayloul Festival in Beirut in September 2000.

Subsequently, it has been performed in festivals in Europe

The Tape

In 1985, Jamal El Sati, a Lebanese communist recorded a videotape testimony just a few hours before carrying out a suicide operation against the Israeli Army which was occupying southern Lebanon at the time. He wore the clothes of a local sheikh and led a donkey loaded with 400 kg of TNT up to the headquarters of the Israeli military governor in Hasbayya. After passing three barricades he reached his target, detonated the TNT and exploded himself and the donkey along with it.

Videotaping resistance fighters testifying before executing their suicide missions was a common event of the time. The videotapes were broadcast on television on the evening news.

The "final cut" of Jamal El Sati's videotape was first seen on Tele-Liban. After 14 years, and by pure chance, a friend of ours fell upon the "uncut rushes" of his testimony. She found it neglected resting on a shelf in the offices belonging to the LCP.

In the tape, Jamal El Sati repeats his testimony three times before the camera before deciding on the best version to be presented to the public. The difference between the three is minimal, even unimportant. The public was supposed to see only one of these versions, an incontestable and an unequivocal presentation.

Up until then, all we had ever seen on television were the “final cuts”, clear statements made without any hesitation, errors or stuttering. This video revealed the moment of hesitation. The instant we saw the “stuttering” of the martyr, we realized something simple, so simple that it was obvious – that the martyr is not a hero but a human being. It seems to me that people have forgotten this or that they do not want to be reminded of this anymore.

The Genesis

The video was the catalyst for creating *Three Posters*. We fell under the spell of Sati's repetitions and decided to present these repetitions to the public by making it the subject of a theatrical performance. But such a decision to present the video “as is” did not come easily; we faced several moral dilemmas: Should we allow a public “foreign to the party and the family” to witness a martyr's emotions before his death? Could we present a tape that did not belong to us? Would he have wanted *this* video to be seen with all its rehearsals? Were we exploiting this tape to make an “art-work” from which we would draw both moral and financial profit? Were we, in a sense, violating the sacred space of the martyr?

The more we debated these questions, the more we became convinced that the issue was not an ethical one but rather an accumulating series of questions of profound depth. The question more about the Civil War and the role the Lebanese Left played in this civil strife. How the resistance against the Israeli Occupation began as secular and ended as fundamental and fundamentally Islamic, that is, under the command of the Hezbollah? How the Left failed? The question of the use of media in politics and their relationship to, or correlation with, death. The questions of the medium itself: how does video relate to an action that is going to happen but that we have not witnessed yet, particularly when we are accustomed to thinking of video as the recording of something that has happened? How does such “documentation” represent or deceive reality?

In the beginning, our idea was simply to show the videotape alone. The footage spoke for itself; it did not need our intervention. But in the end, we are talking about an artistic performance not political action. This core dynamic meant it would not be enough just to present the video. We began to discuss what relationship we would create between the video and a live performance. We considered returning the videotape to where it belonged, and re-enacting, “performing” the story, recording it on a videotape in front of the audience. We would invite spectators in the audience and give them the chance to play the role of the martyr and to record his/her testimony as if he/she is about to execute a suicide operation. The idea behind this was to focus on the paradox of the sentence: “I am the martyr...,” on the fact that a living person says: I am dead. This is an extremely difficult sentence to say.

The final piece was the result of a decision to work within a simple framework: three figures, three possibilities for perceiving death –

1. An actor,
2. A resistance fighter (that is, Jamal Sati)
3. A politician.

1. The Actor. The Truth of Fabrication:

The actor is I, playing the role of a suicide bomber trying to make a “last take” of his testimony. The public watch me through a monitor. However, all of them in Beirut know me as an actor. The idea was not to deceive them. In fact, we wanted it to be clear that Rabih Mroué is playing the role of the martyr Khaled Rahal. There will be no confusion between the real and the fictional.

As soon as I finished recording three different takes of my supposedly testimony, I abandon the role of the martyr and spoke as myself. I read out my own name, date of birth and a few other details of my “personal life”. So I am not only on the monitor but also present in live before them simultaneously. The audience discovered that the role I acted out was not a “moment in the past”; I mean, it was not recorded on a

videotape beforehand. But actually I was playing it “live”, behind a door, facing a camera and I was viewed directly by the audience through the mediation of a video monitor. The deception was carried out through the monitor, a deception that was immediately exposed at the moment I opened the door and the audience sees me alive and live. It is at that instant that the fabrication of the false moment is made apparent. At that instant, it is as if the martyr has come to life before them. Who, then, is the specter: the flesh or the image, I or the picture of me?

So, the audience would no longer be sure whether I was acting or not. In fact, at this moment in the performance, fiction intermingles with reality and the audience is led to question everything that follows later in the performance. Especially, the “real” martyr’s tape which would be shown few minutes later and most probably will be also seen as a mixture of reality and fiction.

2. The Martyr. The Fabrication of Truth:

One might say of Jamal El Sati’s video with its many takes that the repetition by Jamal is no more than his attempt, like any of us, to create the best and most ideal image of himself before his death. That Jamal El Sati, like any actor, tries different takes. But why would Jamal try to act? Why would someone who is going to committee a suicide military operation try to act?

What traces a martyr leaves after the suicide “mission”? Are they the physical effects – that is, what this mission has cost the enemy? Or is it the video he leaves behind? And which is ultimately the stronger? It is as if Jamal El Sati realized that the video he was going to leave behind was of more importance than the actual mission. Accordingly, the act of martyrdom begins with the moment he faces the camera because it appears that *in his mind*, when he achieves the “final take”, he is in actuality committing the act. At that instant, he becomes the martyr. The video is his final image, the supposedly self-evident truth that will outlive his death. But in fact, for us, this threw radically into question the status of the video as a record, a representation, a documentation of death.

But this conclusion – that the martyr is searching for the “best take” like an actor – is belied by the fact that the difference between each take is very slight so that it is hard to be convinced that it is an ideal image that he is after.

In fact, it seems, neither a calculated desire to gain the sympathy of the spectators nor a belated consciousness of what will become of him after his death, but above all, an unformulated and in fact, “unformulable” desire both to defer death and to withdraw from life. The repetition is the sign of this two-fold desire for deferral and withdrawal.

3. The Politician. Other Truths:

The third man in the performance is the politician, the person responsible for Jamal El Sati’s operation, the party’s leading figure: Elias Attallah. This was in an attempt to bring to light the political circumstances that surrounded this mission, and to prompt a re-evaluation of the political practices and experiences of the Left during the civil war. The politician agreed that we could film him any way we wished. During the interview, which lasted for 20 minutes, we outlined his frame so that he appeared as an under-exposed silhouette and lit his face just as he finished speaking. His face was visible only for an instant before it was over-exposed. We wanted to burn out his image with light, metaphorically killing him with the camera as in a sense was Sati. To this day, I don’t know why this party official agreed to play with us in this performance and why he watched what we did to his image without any objections. Perhaps it is that the camera has an irresistible magic but it still bewilders me to watch the politician surrender to the Power of the camera and its domination of reality.

Travel and Translatability

Unfortunately, when we took the performance abroad, many aspects of the performance were lost. But this is natural because we did not, in any way or form, expect the foreign audience to comprehend the nuances in our critique of our experience. We had produced the performance with a Beirut audience in mind and we knew that a foreign audience would have little knowledge of the details of our history, and of our Civil War. Still *Three Posters* seemed to be received well abroad. Audiences paid particular attention to the direct relationship between the performance and the Lebanese Civil War. They grasped that the history was too complex to be summarized and more importantly, they appreciated the differences between our portrayal of the civil war and the 'official' discourse that had hitherto fed them simplistic outlines of Lebanese history.

Unfortunately, the foreign press inevitably linked the performance with 'current events'. For us, it was a challenge to keep *Three Posters* free from this line of interpretation and to insist on its Lebanese context. Here, it is imperative to clarify that the premiere performance was in the year 2000, before September 11 and before suicide missions became a symbol in the Palestinian Intifada. *Three Posters* is not related to the current phenomena, which today are being committed by Islamic 'fundamentalists'. However, as a secular and 'left wing' act, the notion of a suicide mission enacted by a communist is open to interpretation, challenge, and debate. With fundamentalists, there is clarity in the motivation behind such missions and little, if no room, for debate. In this sense, *Three Posters* attempts to re-evaluate the politics and role of the Lebanese Left during the Civil War. It makes a critical and auto-critical assessment of our absence today in the Lebanese political arena – and in a way, declares our defeat.

In retrospect, especially with regard to the media coverage we received, we failed in communicating this crucial distinction. The press was stronger than our discourse. They have a fascinating way of appropriating an idea and adapting it for their journalistic, political – and maybe even commercial – purposes. The subject of *Three Posters* was rich bait for the media. And it is this environment today that has led us to take the difficult decision to discontinue the performance. We don't feel like playing, with this subject, one that is sensitive and quite personal for us. For us, it is a zero-sum game.

Rabih Mroué, *With Soul, with Blood*, 2006

Video, 11:00 min.

Script

I am one of the thousands that were present in this demonstration...my face is one of those faces but I don't know which one exactly, at first I thought that it's possible that I might be the one standing here then I said no it isn't possible because this he does not look like me... and this one also does not resemble me, I look closely and I know that he does not look like me, although all of us here look alike... and though I'm different from all the others here; but how can I prove this? Simple, if I find my face in this crowd then I'll be able to prove it... This is me ... No, it isn't... This man has enthusiasm that I don't have, although here it looks like we all have one enthusiasm... one voice... and the voice disappears... no more sound...but my enthusiasm is a different kind of enthusiasm...let's say this is me... I'm sure nobody will believe that this is me...I'm different... I'm here with them but I'm different... but who will believe me... Here, we all resemble each other except for this one... the one that lies inside the box... this one is for sure different from all the others... sure?!.. I don't know.

Rabih Mroué, *Noiseless*, 2008

Installation (Text; Video, 04:30 min.)

Script (wall text)

I have been collecting my photographs as a missing person as they have appeared in newspapers. It was not clear to me why I was doing it, but I felt somehow intrigued by the question: Where could I disappear to, particularly in a country like Lebanon, so small, where it is said that everyone knows everyone else, where the least said on its society is that it is confessional, communitarian, tribal, and so on and so forth...

It seems that no matter how well control and authority are established over this country, or any country for that matter, there are always cracks and fissures where individuals disappear into; to them, they escape, in them they elude, get lost, and sometimes even commit a crime and all this without leaving behind not a single trace.

Grandfather, Father and Son, 2010

Installation (Mixed media),
produced by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht

Script (wall texts)

The library:

The grandfather's library contained more than 8,000 books. When he was in his seventies, his vision became weak, and he could no longer remember the exact placement of the books on the shelves. If he needed a particular book, it would take him a great amount of time and suffering to find it. The father decided to find a solution to this problem; he asked his daughter (the sister) to help him devise a system to categorize the books. They gave each book a number and a separate card. On this card, they would write the number and the title of the book. They arranged all the cards in alphabetical order, so that when the grandfather would need a book, he would look for its title in the cards, see the number, and follow the number on the library's shelves. It took the father and the sister a whole year to complete this mission. After the death of the grandfather, no one relied on the cards anymore, and they became useless. The son took the cards, and decided to arrange them non-alphabetically, in the same manner that the grandfather had initially organized his library.

The book:

In 1979, the father decides to write a book on mathematics, inspired by Fibonacci's theories. As soon as he starts writing this work, the war flares up again in Beirut. The father perseveres in his project, despite the civil war that is trying to stop him from pursuing this cerebral endeavor. In 1982, the Israeli government learns that the father is close to completing the project, and rushes to invade Lebanon, in order to stop him from finishing his work. The Israeli invasion starts in June 1982. The father insists on persevering with the project, intensifies his cerebral effort, the Israeli army surrounds Beirut where he is working, it starts bombing the city from the air, and the land, and the sea, and yet the father does not stop working. In spite of the shortage of provisions and food and the power cuts and the loss of water and petrol, he goes on with his writing. He pursues the project to its end, and gives the book a name: *Variations on a Theme by Fibonacci*. He had achieved victory over the Israeli army, in writing a book that seems to benefit no one, least of all himself.

The short story (*CheckMate*):

In the year 1989, the son wrote his first short story. It is the tale of a family locked in their house during a bombing volley between East Beirut and West Beirut. The story describes how the different members of this family spend their time during this bombing, in a corner of their house, which they assume to be safe. The story ends with a bomb actually hitting this corner of the house. The reader understands that the family was hit, but does not know the extent of the casualties. A very short time later, during an actual round of bombing, the son found himself with his family in the same situation as in his story. They ended up in the same manner as the family in the son's story. The mother, the sister, and the older brother were wounded. This incident had a tremendous impact on the son, and he interpreted it as a sign that he should not write any more short stories. This story was the first and the last one he wrote. Afterwards he stuck to theater, despite his uncle's encouragement to focus on writing and literature, rather than theater.

Fibonacci (Leonardo of Pisa or Pisano 1170–1250) posed the problem: "How many pairs of rabbits can be produced from a single newly-born pair in a year if:

I each pair begets a new pair every month,
II which, at the end of the second month, becomes productive,
III where death does not occur."

The father became interested in this problem, and performed long experiments and calculations, based on the limited references in his private library. It took him almost four years to complete this version; upon finishing it, he tried to contact different journals and editors, with no success. The project ended up on one of the shelves in his house.

The grandfather shaves his beard and moustache; he removes his religious garb, puts on a white shirt, a suit, and a tie, and knocks on the door of his house. His wife opens, looks at him strangely and asks: "Yes? What can I do for you?" He answers: "I'm Hussein, your husband."

The brother, to whom the short story is dedicated:

On the day of the assassination, in February 1987, the younger brother, Yasser, ran to the grandfather's house as soon as he heard the news. On his way there, he was shot by a sniper; the bullet entered his skull on one side, and exited from the other. This bullet caused him to lose his memory of pronunciation, and his memory of writing. Ten years after this incident, the younger brother wrote and read aloud these words: "In death, we do not write. We speak, with words that very few of the living can comprehend."

The newspaper where the short story appeared:

Al-Nidaa ("The Call") newspaper was a daily that was affiliated with the Lebanese Communist Party. Between 1982 (the year when the father was done with the writing of his mathematics book) and 1987 (the year when the grandfather was assassinated and the younger brother was shot), the son would go around distributing the newspaper every single Sunday, as part of his Party duties. He would carry a stack of newspapers under his arm, and knock at the door of all the houses in the neighborhood, repeating the same sentence: "Good morning! Would you like to read *Al-Nidaa* newspaper?" Once he was finished with this Party task, he would spend a whole week trying to rub off the ink-stains that had formed on his arm and fingers from carrying the stack of newspapers. When the civil war ended, the *Al-Nidaa* daily stopped being published. The ink remained, though.

The bomb that hit the house:

Some time after the bombing, as the family was trying to fix the house, the father found the remains of the shell that had hit the house. He cleaned it and found a manufacturing inscription at the bottom of the remains: "Made in Iraq." He was relieved, as this reminded him of the childhood he spent in Iraq with his father (the grandfather).

The assassination:

The grandmother opened the door. One of the two armed men asked her about her husband, demanding to see him in order to sign a petition denying the civil conflicts taking place in Beirut at the time. The grandmother asked him to leave his gun in the living room, and to go towards the bedroom, where the grandfather was napping, as was his habit. The armed man complied, but was hiding a handgun equipped with a silencer.

The uncle:

On the day that the son's short story was published in the newspaper, the uncle sent him a note stating the following:

"Mister Rabih,

Greetings and congratulations on your story: "To Hell With!" You should keep on writing these stories, because literature sees in you a magnificent writer. And to hell with acting! At your father's—as I've heard—there is a copy of the Old Testament. Would you please ask your respected father to be so kind and lend me this copy for only two days? And should your father be so kind and accept this request, in your turn, would you please be kind and caring enough to bring it with you to my office? Thanks to the respected father, and thanks to you, and thanks to Ziad, the carrier of this note.

Nizar"

The sister:

The sister studied archiving. She was the one who was hit in the chest after her brother (the son) had completed the writing of his first and last short story. Upon the father's request, she devised a strategy to organize the grandfather's library. She gave each book a number, and each number a separate card. She arranged the cards alphabetically in wooden drawers, made by the father. When she was done with this job, she looked on her achievement with pride, and then left the country to a faraway destination, never to come back.

The mother:

After the bomb hit the house, the whole family ran with the two wounded (the sister and the older brother) to the American University Hospital, where the father was treated for leukemia in 1975. When they just reached the hospital, they noticed that the mother was also wounded. In the panic and the anguish, nobody realized she had been hit as well. Even she didn't realize...

The father dreams that he sees the rabbits, and follows them down into the hall of many doors.

The wife:

On the day of the grandfather's assassination, the son met his girlfriend, who would become his wife. She offered her condolences, they became angry together, and then sad together, they embraced each other, kissed each other, lay down on the bed together, and spent the whole night together. On this night, they lost their virginity together.

The friend (who drew the picture for the short story):

The son asked his friend, the artist Edgar Aho, to draw a picture for his short story, to accompany its publication in the newspaper. Although he did not think the story was good, Edgar complied and drew the picture, out of friendship for the son. After the end of the war in Lebanon, Edgar went up to the fourteenth floor of the building where he lived in Beirut, and leapt into the void. It was the jump of a lifetime. The local community believed that Edgar was part of a devil-worshipping sect, and that his leap was caused by his satanic beliefs. While in fact, his leap was merely an act of protest against the communitarian, religious society in which he lived. He always used to say to the son: "Tears are not like onions," and laugh.

The older brother:

A long time after the bombing of the house, as the son was gathering the material for an exhibition, he asked the father about the exact date of the bombing. He asked the mother; he asked the sister; he asked the younger brother; he asked the older brother... Each one of them gave a different date. There was a lot of argument between them concerning the date, as each one of them believed he or she had the right one. This went on until the older brother, who was hit during the bombing, remembered he had photos that were taken right after the house was hit, and that the dates were indicated on the photos. This was a decisive proof, which would bring the whole discussion to an end. The family waited for two days for the older brother to find the pictures. When he did, and brought them over, it turned out there was no date on them. But they all agreed that it was sometime between August and September 1989, in other words after the son had written his first and final short story.

The house:

In 1975, at the beginning of the Lebanese civil wars, the house was hit. Despite this, the family did not realize that the wars had really started, maybe because there was no one in the house at that time.

When the house was hit a second time, in 1989, they realized that the wars had already started, and had been going on for a long time, maybe because they were all in the house at that time. In this moment, they started to be afraid. Officially, the first bomb to hit the house (in 1975) marked the beginning of the wars, while the second one (in 1989) announced the end of the wars.

Rabih Mroué, *Je Veux Voir (Ich möchte sehen)*, 2010

Installation (Photo montage, 2 Videos, Text, 5:13 min. und 00:30 min., Loop),
produced by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht

Script (wall text)

I could have been with any name.
I could have been merely a number with no name.
I could have been a persona, which exists in a work of art.
I could have been entirely fictional.
I could have been an image or a plot in a movie sequence, with a narrative structure.
I could have been in any location at any time,
if Catherine had not shouted out my name twice, Rabih! Rabih!

I, the Undersigned: I and We, 2011

Installation (text, two videos, 4:10 min. and 3:50 min.)

Script (Wall text)

The work "*I, the Undersigned*" was supposed to be here. It is an installation which consists of two monitors and one wall text that draws attention to the intentional disregard of those responsible for the Lebanese civil wars and their refusal to give any apology to their people for all that they committed during the wars (1975-1990). Beside this text, one monitor shows my personal apologies for what I did during those years, and another monitor shows my face staring at you.

I decided not to show this work today due to the radical changes, struggles, conflicts, revolutions and turmoil of a geopolitical and sociopolitical nature that are going on in my region. These changes pushed me to change the title of this exhibition from "*I, the Undersigned*" to "*The People are Demanding*"; from "I" to "We" as I believe that I belong to the people. But "I" seems to me not to be changing while "We" is changing very fast. Between that "I" and this "We" there is a big red question mark.