

---

How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad.  
Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

---



---

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad.

### Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

---

#### **How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad.**

When Friederike Schuler, curator and initiator of this exhibition, invited me to speak to the work of Walid Raad - here in Cologne at St. Peter - she sent me some photographs along. They showed the two large wooden sculptures "I long to meet the masses once again" which gave the exhibition its title. Two sculptures, human and bird, built from wooden crates, whole or cut into pieces, which are generally used to transport art. The pictures present them as public monuments in this very Roman Catholic Church, a gothic cathedral, utterly destroyed in 1943, built between 1513 and 1525. And it may be of interest that the artist Paul Rubens was baptized and christened as Peter Paul Rubens in this church. I thought I had seen these sculptures before. I had seen the work "I feel a great desire to meet the masses once again\_VI, XVII, XXXIII [in Roman numbers]" in the exhibition "Let's be honest the weather helped" at the Stedelijk, for example. Or just recently, at Sfeir-Semler in Hamburg, in the exhibition "Sweet Talks", similar sculptures were shown. There, just like here, they are referencing the selfsame story of that Lebanese government official by the name Hilwé Hilwé who had been reassembling pieces of sculptures dismantled under the impact of the Lebanese

war, giving them a new life here in Cologne, here in St. Peter, in form of double gangers that do not quite look like themselves. But in Hamburg, their names were different. "Preface to the Seventeenth Edition" - no longer "I long to meet the masses...", leading us on to "Preface to the Third Edition," the Metropolitan Museum solo show of Walid Raad in 2018 or "Preface to the First Edition," his solo show in the Louvre 2013, none of which has shown any of these or similar sculptures. These Preface exhibitions, in turn, belong to yet another art work - named "Scratching on Things I could Disavow." All these exhibition titles, names of artworks, are linked to one another in metonymic chains. Do they offer scenes of transit, indicating processes of transformation? What happens to sculptures when they pass through such a maze of names and titles? Do they exchange faces? Are we meant to get lost here? Why create names as hideouts for transference?

We should not get carried away right at the beginning, although such slips in names and titles may indeed incidentally protect the art works and lead the sculptures to a strange homecoming of sorts. After all the artist's work "Scratching on Things I could Disavow" with its various "letters to the reader" indeed deals with shadows of art works being imprisoned, cut off, or

---

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad. Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

---

separated, set free, at times even resuscitated or reunited with their bodies, all witnessed by the artist and documented by the artist's hand and speech.

Wherever these names' slips may lead - the two sculptures here seemed physically different to me from those in Amsterdam, Stockholm, and Hamburg.



They stand majestically, in their flat attire of 2D performers in this very Roman Catholic Church, but it is their large and looming shadows that caught my attention.

These shadows are so lively and captivating, they do not double any image at all, they seem liberated, free, revealing an independent life of their own. I saw a giant double winged creature take off, a Simurgh untying its bonds, escaping its ties to the body. I saw a line of flight for shadows. Thus I named my talk "How (not) to speak shadows." "Wie nicht über Schatten sprechen." I did this quickly, and sent it off without much thinking. Perhaps I had Paul Celan's "Schatten sprich auch Du" in mind. Or the "Speak shadows" essay of Tony Chakar, the Beirut artist whose 2010 lecture walk "The Sky Over Beirut" I will never forget, an exercise in psycho-geography that took walking as a means to redeem shadows from the wounds of the city. But why the negation? Why "not to speak shadows"? The negation indicates a precaution. "Wie nicht sprechen." "How to avoid speaking" was the title of a lecture Derrida gave in Jerusalem, the only one he ever delivered there, in the year 1987, at the brink of the desert at Har Zofim when I still lived in that city and thought I would never leave.



---

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad.

### Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

---

How not to ... not to speak, not to touch, not to interpret, not to act ... I come to think of the ancient poet who speaks to the daughters of Jerusalem "I adjure you: Do not arouse or awaken love, do not speak about love until it so desires. Is it the right to opacity then, the right to secrecy that pertains to an art work's shadow just the way it pertains to the lovers' secret that's at stake here? Does the artist by veiling his works in slippery names and titles protect their right to opacity? in similar ways in which one protects the lovers' right to secrecy? And is this very act of veiling the art works' secrets then emulated now by the caretakers of this very Roman Catholic church, having concealed the faces of all its art works as if to say - caution - lent - handle with care - do not touch, do not arouse, "do not awaken the shadow until it so desires"? Is it that? Walid Raad sets out to protect other art works' shadows? and an entire church does the same? And nu, what then?

Yes, we do see lines of flight for shadows in the artist's work. But how are they connected to a way of speaking? Are the warps and slips in the artist's titles indeed escape ways for shadows covered by metonymic chains of language operations? "I long to meet the masses once again," slipping into "I long to meet the masses once more" or "I feel a great desire to see the masses once again," or think of his "Sweet Talk: Beirut (Commissions)" in

its various aberrations, his "Preface to the First, Third, Ninth, Seventeenth Edition," all tunnels for escape? "Scratching on Things I Could Disavow, Letters to the Readers, I want to be able to welcome my father in my house again," all thresholds for smuggling art works and their censored belongings?

Afraid of getting lost in all this, scared to lose myself in the thickets of an alluring, indeed tricky and slippery language game which the talmudic masters refer to by the acronym "Pardes" - "Paradise" in English, I turned to personal guidance of the artist. I confessed to him that I had given this title thoughtlessly and that I now find myself trapped in a deadlock with no easy way out. "The reason" I wrote "lies deeper - in my own obsessive interest in shadows - more specifically - how names assume the function of shadows in some medieval Jewish mysticism.

The next day I got an E-Mail back. "This can be very rich. I had not heard of this before."

Thus I went further. Deeper into Pardes. It is one thing to think about art works becoming hideouts for other art works in need. But even their names and titles? How do *they* become thresholds for shadows to pass? And what about the names and numbers hiding

---

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad. Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

---

inside those names and titles? Hilwé Hilwé, St. Peter, 1975, 2020, 1978, and so forth. How do *they* speak shadows?

We have to proceed slowly not to get dizzy. Let me consult "Another Letter to the Reader," a public art work by Walid Raad which was shown at the 14th Istanbul Biennial in the year 2015 which I have seen:



an installation with several moving boxes and crates made of brown paper and wood, exhibited at Istanbul's Free Mason's former subterranean vault, today the basement of Minerva Han, an old building in Galata used as a bank since the early 20th century and serving as Sabancı University's contemporary art gallery *Kasa galeri* since 1999. The installation spread through all three rooms of the vault, with boxes and crates assembled into wall-like structures resembling scenes of moving and transport. There were holes cut

out of the long side of the boxes. According to the artist's communication, they served as escape routes for some art works or even just their forms or shadows stored inside the boxes. But why were these art works being stored away in boxes? The answer may lead us astray - but I feel you should know. At the beginning of World War I, the Young Turk Minister of War, Enver Pasha, one of the main perpetrators of the genocide on the Armenians, had all the precious courtly Iznik ceramics be stored in subterranean bank safes in order to protect them from war. And yes, the artist, for reasons of solidarity and love rushed to their side. He rushed to save those Iznik ceramics from Enver Pasha's subterranean safes. Why? Because what looks like a safe to the Pasha may indeed turn out to be a prison, or even grave for the art work. Realizing that the magnificent red, blue and green-colored tulips, birds, and animal motifs will surely be damaged by false protectors, the artist created escape ways for - yes - for what makes the art works unique - namely their forms and shadows. But what happened to these forms and shadows of the famous Iznik motifs then, after they escaped from Enver Pasha's safe? You must have heard about what happened to them.

The answer lies right here before our eyes. "Sometime in the middle of the seventeenth

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad. Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

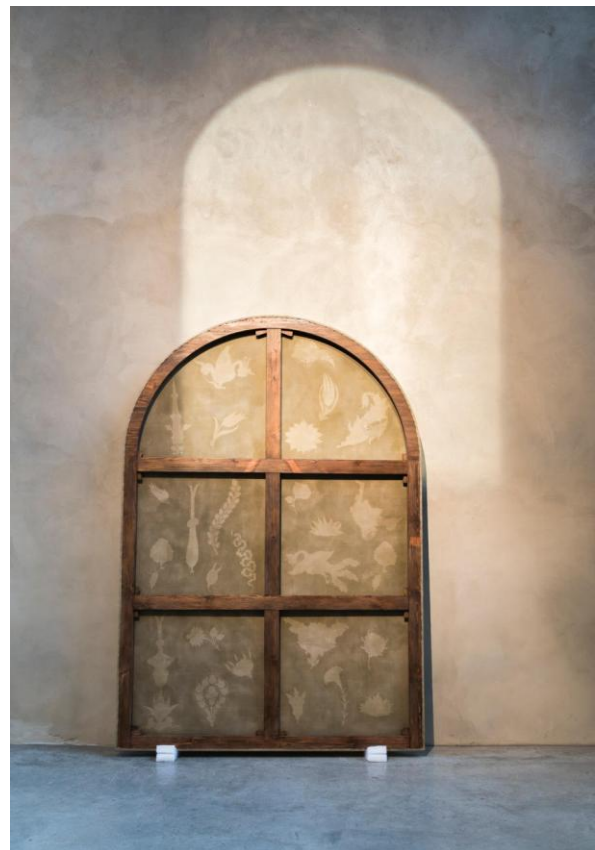
**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

century, 27 Iznik motifs vanished from the Ottoman empire" ... and so forth. I do not have to remind you where these lines are coming from. They stem from the porous name of the work "I long to meet the masses once more 2020" shown right here at St.Peter. Yes, I long to meet the masses once more, not once again. There is a deviance in the doubling of the title. To see this work we do not have to go far, it is standing here right next to us, leaning its face to the wall, showing us the back of a painting upon which fresh traces of Iznik's motifs are clearly seen.

Shades of absence, not too different from the large shadow of light witnessing the absence of Peter Paul Rubin's late work on St. Peter, the Roman martyr, St. Homme of Rome. Listen carefully how the title slips, and fathom the doubling, the split, the threshold through which the secret, the shadow passes. "I long to meet the masses once more" - not "once again." The word "more" marks the overflow in the doubling of the title, it is the surplus in the repetition, "more" indicates the surplus inside any "once again."

I read to you the full name of the art work, and you will realize the rift, the split through which the Iznik shadows slip:



"I long to meet the masses once more. 2020. Sometime in the middle of the seventeenth century, 27 Iznik motifs vanished from the Ottoman empire, their fate unknown. Large search parties were dispatched from the outskirts of Vienna to the Indian

---

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad. Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

---

Ocean, the Black Sea to southern Arabia. All to no avail.

Little did anyone suspect that the motifs had taken refuge [here] in Cologne, on the back of Peter Paul Ruben's last completed painting, "The Crucifixion of St. Peter." ...

In 2020, upon the removal of the painting for its most recent restoration, the Iznik motifs ... suddenly became manifest on the back of the canvas. An additional research and restoration project ... concluded that the motifs were once again on the run." What made them run this time, we may ask - but we set this aside for later or never.

Without a doubt, we do see those Iznik shadows testifying to the matter's truth here in the church of St. Peter. And even if they are now missing again, Iznik motifs did hide behind the back of Rubin's work. Evidence sets in. A miracle of sorts. It may be of interest that the Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig defined the miracle as being an advent not of the unexpected, but rather of that which "I longed to see" - of something which will have been expected all along. And

isn't this true especially now - when we are praying for the advent of that future past, of that future moment when we will finally realize that the longing will have come to an end, that we will be finally seeing the masses once again once more - not only here at St. Peter? Was the artist aware of this detour through post-covidian times, did he know this when he created the work "I feel a great desire to meet the masses once again" for the Stejdelik in May 2019? And how did we get here exactly, stepping into what the artist calls a "miraculous beginning," a future past that lies in waiting, promised but not-yet delivered?

All we did is following slippages in names. Yes, "once more" means more than "once again". "*Schlitterlogik*" is how Aby Warburg calls it - following the erratic repetitions of a symptom through its elliptic reappearance veiled by slippages in tongue and time: No, 17th century Ottoman Istanbul is not the time of World War I, nor that of the Lebanese Wars, nor 21st century Cologne with its scenes of contemporary art, nor the future of post-covidian times. Yet without a doubt, we clearly see the evidence of liberation in the work. Whatever the symptom might have been that caused such painstaking serial operations - it materializes in creative action.

---

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad. Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

---

Walid Raad's works are shibboleths for liberation. A shibboleth is that which "permits us to pass or go through, to transfer from one threshold to another." For art works to become hideouts for endangered artifacts they need to act in series, in elliptic repetitions. Their slippages in names and titles become thresholds for shadows to pass. But what about those porous titles' endings, those lengthy prolongations which sound like stories, as if to offer a background to the work in question?

I read to you Walid Raad's full name of the sculptures once again, with all that is in it.

"I long to meet the masses once again. 2019. 1975, at the beginning of the Lebanese wars, most public monuments in Beirut were hastily disassembled and crated to protect them from the ongoing violence. In 1978, and with the wars raging, the crates were sent to Sankt Peter in Cologne for safe storage. The crates were accompanied by a caretaker, a government worker named Hilwé Hilwé.

During her 42 years in Cologne, Hilwé tried to re-assemble the monuments numerous times.

However, the *lack of a breakdown and re-assembly protocol* resulted in odd compositions which Hilwé found more appealing than the original monuments. Over time, Hilwé "composed" dozens of new monuments, two of which are displayed here."

Let's not be distracted by the story. Let's stick to the names and their shadows. Hilwé Hilwé, the government worker, the composer of monuments, who re-assembled those sculptures into dozens of new ones while missing the matrix of their original form. Why does it say "composing," not "creating" those new monuments which she found more appealing than those that were lost? Because Hilwé was lacking the code, the architectural blue-print, the original plan, she could only re-assemble, not recreate, those works. In a long series of variations, editions, repetitions she creates copies, aberrations to begin with. A split, doubling, absence, loss stands in for the beginning. If creation is *ex nihilo* - hers starts out with some specific thing, something irretrievably lost.

Doesn't she remind us a bit of Moses the prophet who according to the masters of the Talmud messed up the holy writ? Unknowingly and with the best of intentions



---

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad.

### Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

---

he, Moses, introduced all kinds of flaws and mistakes to the script. Why that? Because he, just like Hilwé, lacked the original code of the letters which the eternal one had given not to him, but to Bezalel, the biblical architect. We are talking here about Bezalel, the artist who was in charge of building the temple, and who knew all of creation's original breakdown and re-assembly protocols including the various measurements for temple, text, and universe, until they disappeared with him, lost to mankind forever. And what is in *his* name - in the name of the artist, what is in the name Bezalel? - Bezalel means literally: in-the shadow of - *bezel-el* - of God. The Talmud continues like this: Why Bezalel and not Moses? The answer lies in the name, literally in its shadow. What do we learn? Are we meant to read all names like the name *Bezalel*? Yes. We are meant to read and speak shadows. The shadow, the gift of the shade, is imparted, spread out, or apportioned according to a thing that's concealed. The shade and the absence of shade depends on a doubling, a rift, a cut, a partition defined by the hour, by a datum, from Latin dare, something gifted and given. There is a doubling due to a mark, a lack, due to a light that's concealed. How then to speak shadows? There must be a lack, a doubling in the given name for the shadow to live, for the gift of the shade to appear.

There is Hilwé Hilwé, with her shadow alive, and there is Peter, Sankt Peter. You see: In 1978, and with the wars raging, the crates were sent to Sankt Peter in Cologne for safe storage. Who's Sankt Peter? The martyr of Rome, the apostle, whose name stands alone, and whose shadow seems missing. St. Peter, St. Paul, the two martyrs, apostles of Rome, they belong together in this very Roman Catholic Church, in which the artist Peter Paul Rubens was baptized and christened by the names Peter and Paul. So let's start with Paul then, let's start with what's missing. Let's start with the name that was skipped when only Peter was mentioned. The rabbis teach us to search for the thing in one's letters or dreams that's left out. When Paul is the thing that's left out in St. Peter - where is his shadow? Where is the double of Paul. How does the chain of shadows continue? We turn to the man who knows to speak shadows. It is Paul Celan, and the name missing with Paul is the name-of-the-father, the name that signifies in its absence, the name missing with Paul. The name missing with Paul is Antschel, anagrammatically transformed to Celan. Celan is a hideout, a refuge for Antschel, just as Peter is a hideout for Paul. And Hilwé? The shade of Hilwé is Hilwé, a doubling for the sake of the living.

---

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad.

Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

---

Yes, it is Paul Celan who teaches how to speak shadows. In the year 1955, he publishes his first collection of poems. It's called: From Threshold to Threshold.

I read, erratically:

"...Speak -  
But don't split off No from Yes.  
...  
Give it the shadow.

Sprich –  
Doch scheide das Nein nicht vom Ja.  
Gib deinem Spruch auch den Sinn:  
gib ihm den Schatten.

Gib ihm Schatten genug,

Give it shadow enough,  
...

See how things all come alive-  
By death! Alive!  
Speaks true who speaks shadow.

Wahr spricht, wer Schatten spricht.  
Nun aber schrumpft der Ort, wo du stehst:

But now the place shrinks, where you stand:

Where now, shadow-stripped, where?

...

Thinner you grow, less knowable,  
finer!

Finer: a thread

The star wants to descend on:

... in der Dünung wandernder Worte."

In the work of Paul Antschel - things all come alive - by death! alive! - Antschel to Celan - Paul to Peter - Hilwé to Hilwé - and names transfigure, shadows are inscribed in the name: "Wahr spricht, wer Schatten spricht" - "Speaks true who speaks shadow." It is the poet - the artist - who - speaks true - who speaks shadow. It is the artist who knows - the place shrinks, where you stand; who knows that things stripped of their shadows are shrinking in transit, that shadow-stripping is somehow related to "thinner it grows, less knowable, finer! a thread." - "My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair." This is the telepathic name of an art work which Walid Raad started to perform together with the Atlas Group, then with Tony Chakar and Bilal Khbeiz in Beirut, reported for the year 1986. It was a performance conference investigating the History of the Car Bomb in the Lebanese Wars 1975-1991 in a Beirut theater. This

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad. Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

work has been performed in numerous variations afterwards, wherever the Atlas group performed, in solo and group exhibitions at London's Tate, New York's MoMA, Vienna's mumok, Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof, the Venice Biennial, the Whitney Biennial, Kassel's Documenta, the list is too long to spell out. Walid Raad's "My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair..." and his "The Atlas Group": "the place shrinks, where you stand" - where now, he asks, "where now, shadow-stripped, where?"

While I am writing, the catalogue with more splendid pictures arrives. I long to meet the masses once again. Finally I can study the sculptures in detail, feel their textures, see the proportions in space, follow the shades of the hour, sense the sculptures from close. Some of the plywood looks strong, but in the folds of their wounds, where all those crates were cut into pieces, there, at the seam, the wood looks vulnerable and flat, as if freshly cut, a visceral layer, an inside skin, the inside turned outside. You see, how "the outside sometimes becomes form, more inside than inside" - the artist then told me, just like any words that are spoken - everything is out on the surface, the ancient rabbis say, and this is transmitted in the name of Ben Bag Bag, a 4th century sage:

the letters, just turn them and turn them - *hafach ba wahafach ba*, everything is in them. Reflect on them and grow gray with them. [Don't turn away from the surface.]

And that lady, over there, a *christo vivo* upright and female?



---

## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad.

### Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

Her body is flat, and I know her from somewhere. Yes, she mimed a military fatigue for fighting militias before. How does she do it? How does she manage to hide and escape, and then reappear on such deviant scene?

Walid Raad shows her to us in his Appendix 137 of "Scratching on Things I Could Disavow."



He shows us the look-books of several Lebanese artists who volunteered their services during the war years and designed camouflage military fatigues for the fighting militias.

If you look intently, the fatigue of this lady is there among them. Somewhere in trouble, she mimes her own personage, leaves her mime on the scene, trades in her face, and escapes with her shadow alive.

Yes. Those sculptures are near. And they seem far. That's another title that slips. Those that are near. Those that are far. That was the exact name of Walid Raad's exhibition in Pulheim, not far from here, a bold project installed in the synagogue of Stommeln 2016.

Rumor has it that the crates and boxes, cut into pieces and re-arranged by Hilwé here at St. Peter may indeed have been kept there, in the synagogue of Pulheim, before. They were the same boxes, and they left fresh traces there on the synagogue's ground, as if something or someone had left in great haste.



## How (not) to speak shadows. For Walid Raad.

### Exhibition : I long to meet the masses once again.

**Almut Sh. Bruckstein / House of Taswir**

Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne. 25.2.2021

Boxes for art transport had settled there, with their backs facing the walls.



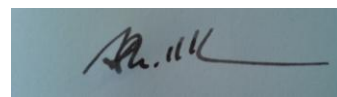
Inside those boxes were all items, objects, and furniture needed for service, all the liturgical objects, the Torah, the prayer books, possibly even the entire rabbinic tradition itself. All these must still be inside.

But why would Jewish liturgical objects seek refuge here at St. Peter? And is it reasonable that these items and public statues from Lebanon find refuge in a catholic church all together? Those synagogue items having merged then with the fragments Hilwé saved from Beirut's surpassing disasters?

In Walid Raad's work radically alienated traditions enjoy surprisingly beautiful encounters. This artist creates hideouts for love that's forbidden. There is another thing in the Talmud the rabbis call "sweeter than

honey." In the Tractate Makkot (Lashes) we find a discussion of ancient "cities of refuge" especially set up for people and objects and stories undead. But no. We do not enter. It might turn out an even more insidious scenario to follow. Not now. Not yet.

Berlin, March 2, 2021



Images in the order they appear

1. Walid Raad. I long to meet the masses once again, 2020/21  
Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Cologne  
Photo: Christopher Clem Franken. © Walid Raad
2. Walid Raad. Another Letter to the Reader. 2015  
International Istanbul Biennial, Kasa Galeri  
Photo: International Istanbul Biennial. © Walid Raad
3. Walid Raad. I long to meet the masses once more. 2020  
Installation View. I long to meet the masses once again, 2020/21. Kunst-Station St. Peter Cologne.  
Photo: Christopher Clem Franken. © Walid Raad
4. Walid Raad. I long to meet the masses once again. 2020/21  
Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Cologne  
Photo: Christopher Clem Franken. © Walid Raad
5. Walid Raad. Appendix 137\_106, 2018  
Archival inkjet print mounted on Sintra  
90.2 × 76.8 × 4.4 cm. © Walid Raad
6. Walid Raad. Those that are near. Those that are far. 2016  
Installation by Walid Raad and SITU Studio in  
Stommeln Synagogue 2016.  
Photo: werner J. Hannappel. © Walid Raad

For all works: Courtesy of the artist and of Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut