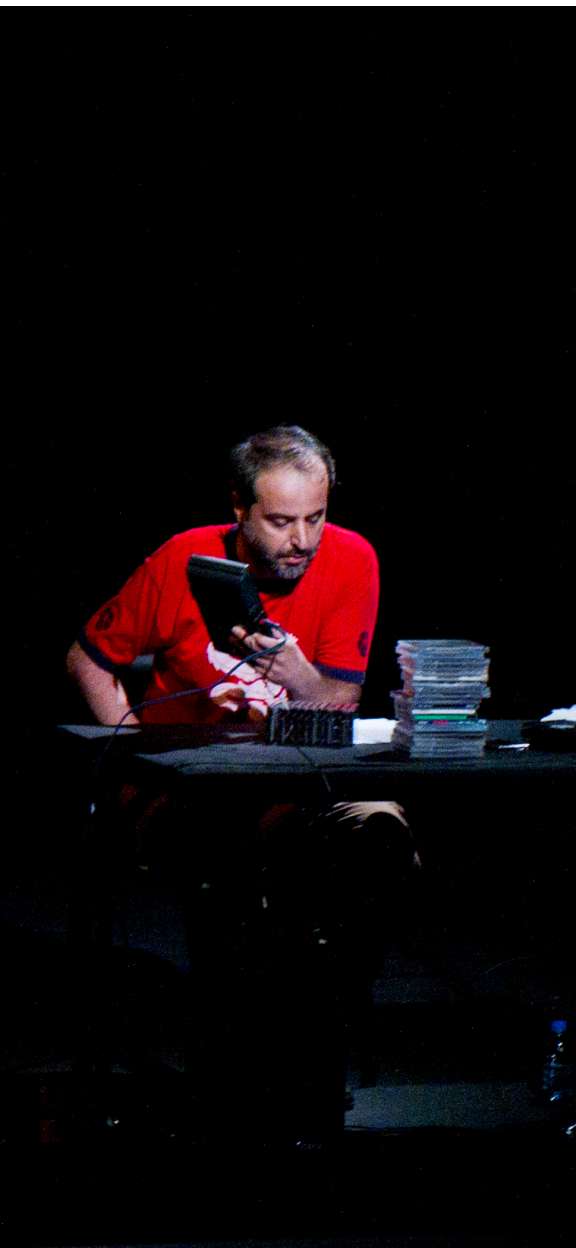


Projects **101**

Rabih Mroué



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Rabih Mroué

Riding on a Cloud

April 21–22, 2015, 7:30 p.m.

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1

Projects 101 features the U.S. premiere of *Riding on a Cloud*, a live performance created by the Berlin-based Lebanese artist, actor, and theater director Rabih Mroué.

Mroué's work, which merges visual art, performance, and theater, eludes simple disciplinary categories. Drawing from a wide range of influences, he has explored different genealogies of performance, from Brechtian critical theater to contemporary performance art. Despite the diversity of his practice, his lecture-performances—or, as he sometimes calls them, “non-academic lectures”—are a key format across his oeuvre.

Along with Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari, Mroué is part of a larger group of artists active in Beirut since the end of the Lebanese Civil War, in 1990, and the effects of that era's political strife infuse their work. Each has, in their own way, sought to explore different aspects of political representation by collecting, chronicling, and exploring preexisting documents, images, and archives from both before and after the war. As Zaatari has noted about Mroué and others of his generation, it is naive to think that artists collected these materials because no one else was doing it during the war, or there was no one else to narrate the war, or they did not believe in the veracity of the documents themselves. According to Zaatari, “the causes and the effects lead nowhere, yet they point somewhere—at areas of confusion rather than certitude.” In this spirit Mroué complicates distinctions between the artistic and the documentary, fiction and reality, as well as viewers' relationships to history. In most of his performances, Mroué uses found documents, video footage, photographs, and objects as points of departure, only to then deconstruct their authenticity. He uses these archival materials to reconstruct certain events, employing a narrative of memory and forgetting in order to create intentional slippages in meaning, compromising the authority of the archival evidence. This strategy suggests that there are an infinite number of “truths,” and limitless angles from which to consider the same event.

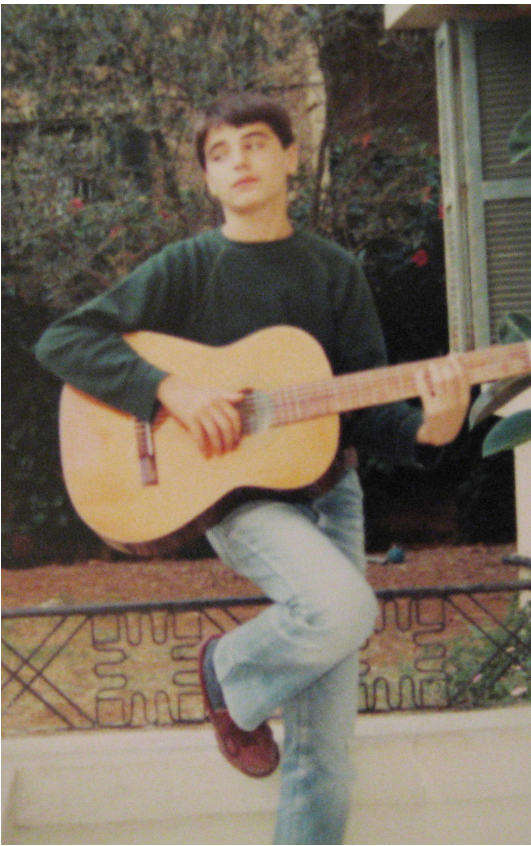
Mroué is also attuned to the ease with which images circulate—and the resulting political implications—and his work deals with the ways in which images impact our relationships, our recording habits, and countless other aspects of our lives. His photographic work *The Fall of a Hair: Blow Ups* (2012) (currently on view at MoMA in the exhibition *Scenes for a New Heritage: Contemporary Art from the Collection*), for example, focuses on the central role of mobile-phone photographs taken during the Arab Spring and the ongoing Syrian uprising in informing and mobilizing people.

For *Projects 101*, Mroué presents the performance *Riding on a Cloud*, based on his brother Yasser Mroué's personal experiences in the aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War. As a young man during the war, Yasser suffered a head injury that resulted in aphasia, a condition that rendered him unable to recognize friends and acquaintances in photographs or other visual representations. Because he was left with this "problem of representation," Yasser's doctor advised that he videotape and photograph his surroundings in an effort to retain an understanding of images and, ultimately, reality. Performed by Yasser himself, *Riding on a Cloud* combines prerecorded video and spoken word in a parafictional meditation on the relationship between lived experience and representation. Here, Mroué constructs a narrative that constantly slips into fiction, a strategy employed in many of his works. This poetic mixture of fact and fiction dissects biography, questions our relationship to images, and interrogates the space between political reality and memory. The combination of autobiographical material with artistic intervention furthers Mroué's explorations of the gray areas between subjectivity and objectivity. In this work, these two points of view do not contradict, but, rather, complement one another.

Currently based in Berlin, Rabih Mroué studied theater at the Lebanese University in Beirut, where he met Lina Saneh, his wife and most frequent collaborator. He has participated in numerous festivals and exhibitions internationally, including the 11th International Istanbul Biennial, Documenta (13), the 2009 Sharjah Biennial, and the 2006 Biennale of Sydney. He is the recipient of an artist grant for Performance Art/Theater from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, New York.

On April 21, Mroué will join writer and translator Omar Berrada for a conversation following the performance.

Berrada, who codirects Dar al-Ma'mûn, a library and residency center for artists, scholars, and translators on the outskirts of Marrakesh, has curated programs at the Centre Pompidou in Paris and at New Museum in New York. With Erik Bullot, he edited *Expanded Translation: A Treason Treatise*, a book of "verbal and visual betrayals"; and, with Yto Barrada, *Album: Cinémathèque de Tanger*, a multilingual book about film in Tangier and Tangier on film. He is currently a visiting scholar at New York University.



#Projects101

Riding on a Cloud

Written and directed by Rabih Mroué
In collaboration with Sarmad Louis
With Yasser Mroué

Organized by Ana Janevski,
Associate Curator, with Martha
Joseph, Curatorial Assistant,
Department of Media and
Performance Art.

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On Front: Rabih Mroué. *Riding
on a Cloud*. 2013. Performed at
HomeWorks 6, Theatre Babel, Beirut,
on May 25, 2013. Photo by Joe Namy

Above: Young Yasser Mroué playing
the guitar. From Rabih Mroué. *Riding
on a Cloud*. 2013