

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

Vinler, John. "Walid Raad," from "What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now," *The New York Times*, March 24, 2022

The New York Times

CHELSEA

Walid Raad



Walid Raad/The Atlas Group's "Comrade leader, comrade leader, how nice to see you" (2022), single channel video, looped, no sound; six paper cutouts. Walid Raad and Paula Cooper Gallery; Stephen Probert

In a darkened, cavernous space, rushing waterfalls spill down the gallery walls surrounding the viewer on three sides. Minuscule figures stand on the floor at the edge of the wall, in the digitally projected cascades, casting their tiny shadows behind. As you approach, crouching down to bring these figures into focus, they reveal themselves as familiar personages at approximately the same height as their innumerable reproductions in newspapers: Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher, Col.

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Muammar el-Qaddafi and others, rendered small in history's unceasing flow.

A churning intermingling of the natural, geopolitical and fantastical characterizes the heady, mischievous work of the Lebanese-born and New York-based artist Walid Raad. Brief texts — part encyclopedic essay and part speculative fiction after Jorge Luis Borges — introduce each of seven series of works that make up "We Have Never Been So Populated." Concurrently presented with three museum shows of the artist's work in Spain, Belgium and Germany, the exhibition presents Raad as sharp and funny as ever, in an experience that feels like an intellectual theme park. At times the narrative concepts are stronger than the exhibited objects, as in a set of facsimile wall maquettes of a Beirut museum where incisions mark the places where the shadows of paintings might fall. But each series rewards with both mystery and insight, most notably a set of photographs winkingly documenting undiscovered cloud studies, possibly painted by John Constable, found hiding on the backs of canvases. JOHN VINCLER