

# RAED YASSIN

## YASSIN HAUTE COUTURE



Yassin Haute Couture was made possible by the 1960s. During no other period of pre-Reconstruction Lebanese history would the Paris-trained Beirut fashion designer Samir Yassin—Raed Yassin’s father—have returned to his hometown to establish his high-end label. Beirut, having become the financial center of the Arab world after the passage of the 1956 Banking Secrecy Law, which encourages foreign investment in the Lebanese banking system, came to boast relative affluence just a decade and a half following its independence from French rule. Prosperity was not for all, but a wealthy urban minority made the most out of the swinging sixties, emblemized by the nightclubs and cinemas of Rue Hamra and the seafloor.

Against this backdrop and well into the Civil War (when he relocated to Jeddah until the 1980s), Samir Yassin was dressing high society with his designs, in addition to being a favorite with Saudi princesses. In fact, Raed Yassin’s cheekily titled “Princess of Oblivion” series (2018), displayed at Marfa’ as part of the artist’s solo exhibition, merely reproduces photographs that his father staged in order to woo Saudi royalty into buying his clothing. Reprinted in a larger format than originally intended, these photographs highlight the images’ clumsy cropping, lack of color correction and the awkwardness of the model Fadwa Harb. Nothing could be further from starry-eyed Harb’s amateurish modeling of heavily embroidered and impossibly sequined, long robes than the coquettish Playboy Mansion girls of the “Playmate of the Month” series (2018), shown on the opposite wall. Upon closer inspection, the skimpy ’80s outfits they wear turn out to be drawings done over the otherwise naked Playmates. Supposedly executed by Samir Yassin himself as a means of

trying out new designs, these additions embody the tension between creativity and eroticism that is at the heart of Yassin’s exhibition.

In the other half of the space, the story of Yassin’s unnamed uncle unfolds in the video *I Hate Theatre, I Love Pornography* (2017). Having fled Saudi Arabia just like his brother Samir due to the impending demise of a forbidden love affair with a Saudi princess, the uncle tries his hand at odd jobs in Beirut, eventually landing one at Cinema Edison—known for its pornographic features—as a projectionist. In this work, the subtitled narration is accompanied by 8mm video footage, which gently moves across a wall covered with cut-outs from adult magazines intended for straight men—a visual trick the uncle devised himself to see titillating female bodies moving, just like on the silver screen.

The strange, oil-money-inflected mirroring between the father’s and the uncle’s stories and the shared objectivization of the female body as a manifestation of creativity lay bare a conflation of male heterosexual desire and creative genius—a combination that makes one cringe. By extension, Yassin’s claim to “uncovering” this history of visual exploitation constitutes an odd parody of a legion of Beirut artists who have worked with the forgotten histories of the Lebanese Civil War by resurfacing authentic or fictional documents, themselves setting in motion a pornography of catastrophe. (In Yassin’s case, the discovery only leads to a couture designer for Middle Eastern glitterati and a macho, porn-crazed uncle.) The success of this critique, however, depends on the works being displayed as a collective whole, while some, such as the neon signs reading *Obsessions* and *Azya’ Yassin* (“Yassin Haute Couture,” both works 2018), serve as fanciful decor.

Positioned across the over-the-top and ethically questionable *The Pimp* (2017)—a taxidermy parrot that provides a lush jazz soundtrack for the exhibition—is the only work that can hold its own: the photo book *The SY Model Collection* (2018). Here, the limbs and curves of Playmates from *I Hate Theatre, I Love Pornography* proliferate in polaroids on top of one another, whether pasted on physically or through an impossible ghostly double exposure, and the female body is fragmented and abstracted in a libidinous frenzy into a Heinekenesque collage. Story lines recklessly mix. In the creases of the magazine cut-outs, the violence of the male gaze becomes most apparent.

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### Opposite page

#### SUH YOONHEE

*Memory Gap, Istanbul*  
2017  
Still from single-channel video of performance with Korean traditional dress, salt and water: 10 min 7 sec.  
Courtesy the artist.

### This page

#### RAED YASSIN

Installation view of *The Pimp*, 2017, taxidermy parrot with sound: 9 min 45 sec (foreground), and “Playmate of the Month,” 2018, series of 18 archival inkjet print on paper, 120 x 55 cm each (background), at “Yassin Haute Couture,” Marfa’, Beirut, 2018. Courtesy the artist; Kalfayan Galleries, Athens; and Marfa’.