



UCL



Geographies of War | Iraq Revisited

18th-27th March 2013, North Lodge, UCL

Geographies of War | Iraq Revisited

About the project

Geographies of War | Iraq Revisited is based on research conducted by Dr Alan Ingram at UCL Department of Geography on the responses of artists and art institutions in the UK to the 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq.

The research and exhibition are supported by UCL and by a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship awarded to Dr Ingram for the academic year 2011-2012.

Exploring how the war was experienced by artists, how they responded and what the effects of their interventions were, the project highlights how art and war alike are concerned with the experience and representation of geographic space.

As well as contributing to academic knowledge and debates, the project aims to inform broader discussions about the war and the role of art in relation to war and peace in the period surrounding the tenth anniversary of the invasion.

For more information, see the project blog at www.responsestoiraq.wordpress.com

Public engagement

Visitors to the exhibition are encouraged to join in discussions about the issues it raises.

Public engagement events related to the exhibition are organised in conjunction with The Mosaic Rooms, Ark Space and Reel Iraq 2013, a festival of Iraqi arts and culture taking place in cities across the UK. Public engagement in the project is supported by UCL.

For more information, see www.ucl.ac.uk/iraq-war-geographies

Acknowledgements

In addition to the participating artists, particular thanks go to:

Robin Start and Joe Start at The Park Gallery (courtesy of whom *My Country Map* by Hana Malallah appears) and Mandell's Gallery (courtesy of whom *The Enemy Within: Driving in Iraq* by Douglas Farthing appears); Rachael Hornsby (The Mosaic Rooms), Yousif Naser (Ark Space) and Dan Gorman (Reel Festivals); and Cath D'Alton, Miles Irving, Laura Cream, Gemma Moore, Sonja van Praag and Susie Chan at UCL.

Geographies of war: responses to the invasion and occupation of Iraq

This exhibition explores how artists with diverse practices and perspectives experienced the invasion and occupation of Iraq and how they responded to it by engaging with questions of space, place, landscape and territory.

Bringing together artists from Iraq and Britain, it shows six works that give material form to the violence, anxiety and ruin of war but which also raise questions about resistance, survival and dreams of peace.

Opening in the week of the tenth anniversary of the invasion, the exhibition presents alternative perspectives on the conflict and challenges our ways of seeing war.

Exploring the works

While the works can be ordered, linked and compared in different ways, here they are presented in the following sequence:

First, *My Country Map* and *STOP#8* rework familiar geopolitical texts, maps and flags, which are torn, burnt and layered in contrasting ways that enact the destruction of war and resistance to it.

The Enemy Within: Driving in Iraq and *Victory Palms* present two landscapes, each of which includes a human figure and each of which evokes different ways of seeing war: a soldier's perspective on the urban landscape and a reimagination of the landscape destroyed by war.

Approaching the war in more symbolic and expressionist ways, *Buhriz* and *Black Rain* explore further the connections between inner and outer terrains, a sense of distance from home and the intertwining of the personal and the geopolitical.

My Country Map

Hanaa Malallah (2008)

Layers of burnt canvas with oil paint, 200 x 200cm

Hanaa Malallah was trained at the Institute of Fine Art, Academy of Fine Arts and Baghdad University. Having lived through thirty five years of war and conflict, she was forced to leave Iraq in 2006 as academics and artists fell increasingly under threat of sectarian violence. *My Country Map* is one of the first works she made in exile.

“To physically taste war is completely different than to experience it second-hand. The first lesson taught by physically tasting war is that ruination is the essence of all being. Death has no meaning and anything solid can be reduced to nothing in seconds. The learning of this process of vanishing, this morphing of matter to dust, of something into nothing, has led me to conclude that ruination, or destruction, is hidden de facto in the phenomenon of figuration. Thus, for the last five years I have explored the space located between figuration and abstraction, between existing and vanishing, a concept which for me also holds deep spiritual meaning.”



STOP#8

kennardphillipps (2005)

Pigment ink on newsprint, 105 x 76cm

kennardphillipps is a collaboration between two British artists (Peter Kennard and Cat Phillipps) working since 2002 to produce work in response to the invasion of Iraq. Made explicitly as a critical tool for movements for social and political change, their work encompasses a wide variety of practices and appears in many different settings, from the street to the gallery as well as on the internet and in newspapers and magazines.

STOP was a series of posters made on surplus newsprint in response to a commission by Gustav Metzger, while based in a studio/gallery space in Norwich. Having learned of the presence of a nearby US airbase from local peace groups, the artists filmed themselves attaching posters to the perimeter fence of the base and the subsequent response of security personnel inside and police outside.



STOP

The Enemy Within: Driving in Iraq

Douglas Farthing (2009)

Indian ink on paper, 58 x 38cm

The Enemy Within: Driving in Iraq is part of a body of art work made by Douglas Farthing after leaving the British armed forces and adjusting to life outside the Parachute Regiment after twenty six years service, in countries including Iraq, Northern Ireland, FYR Macedonia and Afghanistan.

These experiences also influence his way of seeing and painting landscapes at home in Britain: "I'm getting involved with the landscape, not just driving past it, I'll stop and try and paint unusual things. When I paint landscapes, I'm tucked in, I've sat myself down and there's natural cover in front of me. So I've positioned myself as a soldier and I can't help but do that."

This work depicts the restricted view from an armoured Humvee, surrounded by thoughts and recollections flowing through the artist's mind on a rapid drive back to base: phrases from briefings, associations with place and memories of events.

THE ENEMY WITHIN 2009

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of the Normal.

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ISAD
HEBRONIAN

IRANIAN REVOLUTION
GUARDS

Mutahid al Sarir

INSUBGENCY

PEACE
DEMOCRACY

SEMOHAM

JAM IMJAM

POLITICAL WING
Bashdar Shia.

Splinter groups
within the
SAM

IRAQI ARMY SOLDIER DRIVING HUMVEE TO MUCH MONEY NO TRUST

Victory Palms

Emily Johns (2008)

Engraving, 153 x 102mm

Emily Johns was trained at Goldsmiths and has been involved in art and peace activism concerning Iraq for over twenty years. This image draws on British First World War artists as well as more specific references to contemporary conflict. Her work has been used on banners and postcards as well as exhibited in galleries.

“*Victory Palms* was really a response to the bombing of date palms and groves. There is that thing of using trees as a metaphor for humans like in Paul Nash’s paintings, a whole strand of war art that substitutes landscape for people. Palm trees are even more special to Iraqis, with everything around the breaking of fasts with dates and ending Ramadan with dates, there’s such a specialness about it that to destroy a people’s dates is like destroying their spirit. But it also struck me that the palm has a long tradition of being the symbol of victory and that was the sort of victory the West had over Iraq, to destroy its palm trees.”



Buhriz

Satta Hashem (2004)

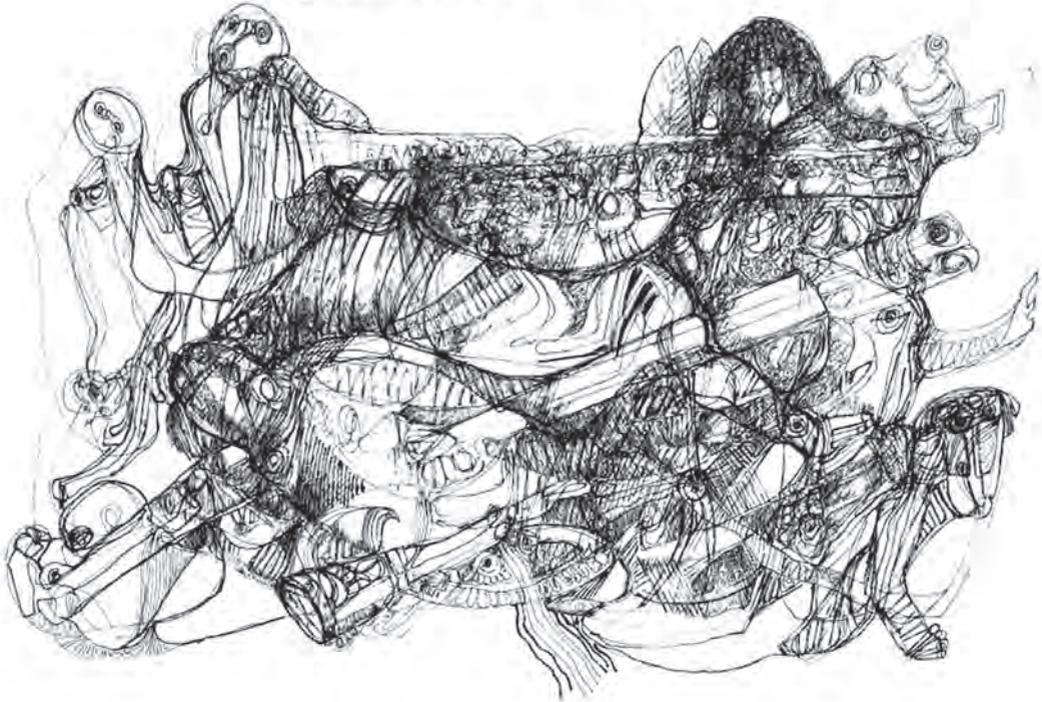
Ink on paper, 33 x 24cm

Satta Hashem grew up in **Buhriz**, Diyala province and left Iraq in 1978 aged 18, having been involved in opposition to Saddam Hussein's regime. He trained in Algeria and the Soviet Union, later moving to Sweden and then the UK. He has kept a daily diary of drawings throughout the wars of 1990-1 and 2003-. A departure from his practice in painting, in which Hashem draws on scientific theories of light and colour; these drawings feed the experience of war through Mesopotamian myths of violence and peace, good and evil, while connecting him with events in Iraq.

The text reads, "I phoned my father today in Buhriz while the American bombing of the people of Buhriz was going on for the second day. It was impossible for him to go out into the garden to get better reception on his mobile phone, and yet he took the risk and ventured out... God keep him safe."

2004-12-17

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Black Rain

Yousif Naser (2012)

Mixed media on canvas, 180 x 200cm

Yousif Naser trained at the Academy of Fine Art in Baghdad (BA), in Dresden and in London (MA), leaving Iraq in 1979 as Saddam Hussein's regime increased its repression of political activists and settling in the UK in the early 1990s. Since 2003 his work has focused primarily on the effects of the invasion and occupation.

Naser's response to the war has been reflected in the ***Black Rain*** series, which emerged initially from a collaborative project with other London-based Iraqi artists and which expresses his need to return continually to the war: Composed of mixed media on canvas and informed by German expressionism, the ***Black Rain*** series includes works in which British newspapers containing reports on everyday stories are used as a base for painting. According to the artist, the newsprint serves as a reminder that "While everyday life continues, elsewhere there is war."





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