

THEATER  
OF OPERATIONS

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مسرح العمليات

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THE  
GULF WARS

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حروب الخليج

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1991—2011





Sample Spreads

The design language combines academic and mainstream print journalism in order to convey media coverage and analysis of the conflicts.

Colophon

This book was published on the occasion of the exhibition *Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991–2011*, curated by Peter Eleey and Ruba Katrib at MoMA PS1, 22–25 Jackson Ave, Long Island City, NY 11101. November 3, 2019–February 2020. ©2019 The Museum of Modern Art.

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After Saddam invaded Kuwait, he was neither moderate nor a modernizer any more. What was he? This is wherries to bear, it is when events hap-pen that trogh it wasn't. It is media in that none of the geopolitics happened outside the space of mediated vectors of communication. It is an event in that it was something singular that unfolded in time, even if it was not clear when it began or

ended, or of it began and ended at the same time for its various global actors involved. Within Iraq itself, Saddam appearing on television and stroking the hair of an English boy could have appeared in rather a different manner. The Iraqi regime of the spectacle was of the kind that Guy Debord called the concentrated spectacle. Here everything was made meaningful through the body of the autocrat.

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After Saddam invaded Kuwait, he was neither moderate nor a modernizer any more. What was he? This is where the narrative faltered, and where things got interesting. If there is a moment to study media, to bring some low theories to bear, it is when events hap.

Contents

Director’s Foreword *Kate Fowle* 00
Preface & Acknowledgements  
*Peter Eleey & Ruba Katrib* 00

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Title of Curatorial Essay Here *Peter Eleey* 00
Title of Curatorial Essay Here *Ruba Katrib* 00
Historic Art of The Region & Dafatir *Nada Shabout* 00
Iraqi Diaspora and Art in U.S. *Rijin Sahakian* 00
The Hostage *McKenzie Wark* 00
Historical Destruction in a Forgotten War *Zainab Bahrani* 00
Baghdad Diaries *Nuha al-Radi* 00
The Gulf War Did Not Take Place *Jean Baudrillard* 00
Montage Obligatory *Serge Daney* 00
Baghdad is Burning *Riverbend* 00

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3

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Plates and reprints run throughout the publication, creating a collision of the two design languages, and presenting the chronology of works.



Roger Brown, *Gulf War*, 1990

# Title of Curatorial Essay Here

*Peter Eleey*

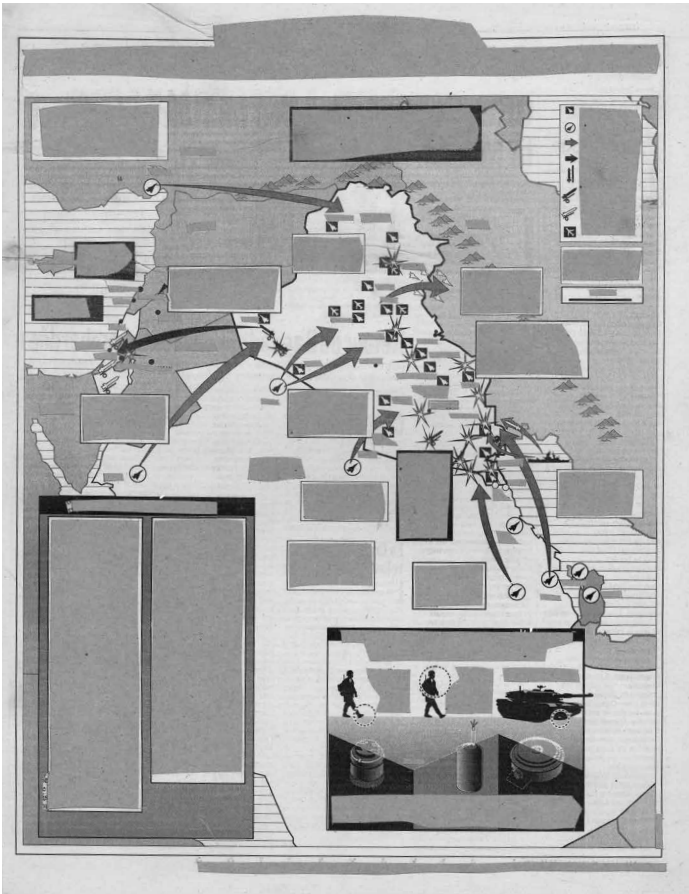
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Judith Joy Ross, *P.F.C. Maria I. Leon, U.S. Army Reserve, On Red Alert, Gulf War, 1990*



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Ali Rashid, *Iraqi Tragedy*, 2003



Hanaa Malallah, *In the Name of War*, 1993

Nuha al-Radi

# Baghdad Diaries

## Day 34

After the rains the streets became black and shiny with great puddle that looked like oil slicks. All the black smoke descended with the rain. Are we retrieving our oil from Rumeila?

Tariq Azia has gone to Moscow, but I don't think that will help us any. Bush is fighting a dirty war. Look what he did to Dukakis during the last campaign. He will continue to hammer us 'til the bitter end, he doesn't care how many Iraqis he kills. The West seems to have only three images of Arabs – terrorists, oil sheikhs, and women covered in black from head to toe. I'm not even sure that they know if there are ordinary human beings who live here.

Have we hit rock bottom yet, or do we still have some way to go?

Hisham came this morning to pay his condolences on Mundher's death, and to say hello. He has been in Suleimaniya all this time, apparently a

lot of people went there to get away from the bombing. He was followed by Tim Llewellyn, the first foreigner I've seen since the war began. I have cousins who are married to Brits but they have been here so long that they are tainted. One does not think of them any longer as foreign. When I saw Tim at the bottom of the drive, I literally bristled. I wonder if he felt it? I'm happy to say that by the time he'd come up our long drive I had gotten over my hostile feelings. After all, one cannot blame individuals for what their governments do. Otherwise we would all have to answer for the mess we're in, and we surely had no hand in this matter. Tim brought faxes from Sol, Dood and Charlie, our first contact with family and friends. A break in our isolation.

We have a new anti-aircraft gun, a 16-millimetre or whatever, very close by. It makes a beautiful, slow, dull, thud-like noise and adds weight to our nightly open-air concert. A modern symphony of sounds, discordant yet



harmonious. At night, when the sky is covered with great big white, yellow and red flashes and our neighborhood gun is thudding away, it is almost possible to fool oneself into thinking that one is attending a Philip Glass-like opera with an overlay of son et lumière. No son or even words yet, but in time it will be history, and they can have the whole of Iraq in which to play this light and sound in. Nobody agrees with my interpretation of our war music. Fun-nily enough, I cannot listen to any real music.

I don't like the siren. It's disturbing in its persistence. The dogs also get upset by that sound, and start barking the minute it goes off.

Well, Mr Bush said no to the overtures of Tariq Aziz. I never thought he would say yes anyway. It doesn't serve his purpose. What a brave man, he passes judgment on us while he plays golf far away in Washington. His forces are annihilating us. I find it very difficult to believe that we have been so discarded by everyone, especially the Arabs. I presume that his war will be the end of so-called Arab unity – that was a farce even while it lasted. I don't think I want to call myself an Arab any more. As an Iraqi, I can choose to be a Sumerian, a Babylonian or even an Assyrian. If the Lebanese can call themselves Pheonicians, and the Egyptians Pharaonic, why can't we follow suit?

We had a super barbecue lunch today. A lovely day, but quite noisy – the racket is still going on even now at mid-night. I can't stand the Voice of America going on about American children and how they are being affected by this war. Mrs Bush, the so-called humane member of that marriage, had the gall to say comfortingly to a group of school kids, 'Don't worry, it's far away and won't affect you.' What about the children here? What double standards, what hypocrisy! Where's justice?

**Day 35**

At about 10 o'clock this morning Tim came by with a BBC retinue, saying that he wanted to do a piece about us surviving in situ. I talked. I don't think I was very good, didn't say any of the things I really wanted to say. I hope they edit all the dumb bits out. Then they filmed us drawing buckets of water up to the roof, and Najul and company camping in Dood's house with Jawdat lying sick in bed. I sent them off with oranges recently picked from the orchard. It will be funny if Sol and Davies see us on television.

The build-up for the land war continues. Are we capable of doing anything now? Are we to expect miracles?

**Day 36**

I am sitting outside typing this diary. It's a beautiful day, delicious-looking, everything clean and shining after the rains, even the oil slicks have disappeared. I've always wanted to write a book starting with this sentence: 'I live in an orchard with 66 palm trees and 161 orange trees; three male palm trees face my bedroom window, reminding me of their potency – the only males in residence. An adobe wall separates us from the neighbouring orchard.' I just typed my coffee cup off the stool with the typewriter carriage – a slapstick image from a silent movie.

We had a peaceful night last night. No air raids. The silence continues. It seems unnatural.

I can hardly believe it, but I've actually forgotten the taste of ice and of cold beer. Warm beer is getting to me. What does it matter? I only have a few bottles left.

My first anemones have come

out. I bought these seeds last year in the USA. They are white. Could it be a sign of peace? Anyways, something good from the USA has grown here.

**Day 37**

Pat heard me on the BBC yesterday. I was called an angry woman – just as well they didn't mention my name. They didn't edit out the silly things I said, like America must be jealous of us because we have culture and they don't, and that is why they have bombed our archaeological sites. Well, who in their right minds would be jealous of us? Charlies used to tell Kiko when he was small, 'Bad luck, kid, not only were you born an Arab, but an Iraqi to boot.' What would he say now?

M.A.W. went to have lunch with Khalil, and was given Khalil's pet cock to eat. It gave him indigestion. Khalil had had this cockerel for seven years before it started to go slightly crazy and ate up two of their hens. Then he turned on the ducks. Khalil took him to the vet and the vet told him to cook him into a tishreeb. Imagine cooking and eating a pet you've had for seven years. It's almost like cannibalism. Khalil is so particular about his personal hygiene that he even locks his freezer just in case anyone should sneeze or cough into it and the germs pollute the goods inside.

It must have been about 9 p.m. and we were all in the kitchen washing up in the flickering candlelight after dinner. It being my turn, I'd cooked up a delicious concoction – pasta with a vodka sauce. The pasta was good, the real thing inherited from the Italian archaeologist who had rented Dood's house, and not stolen Kuwaiti stuff. Suddenly there was a terrible noise and a bright light coming closer and closer, a sun homing into us through the kitchen windows, a white, unreal daylight illuminating us all. The floor was shaking so violently that we thought the house was coming down on our heads. We crouched omn the floor and suddenly, without our knowing how, the door opened and all six of us were outside int eh garden. An immense fireball was hovering over us, a fireball that appeared to be burning the tops of the palm trees. Suddenly this giant flaming object tilted, turned upwards over our heads and went roaring up into the night sky. Suha was on her knees, arms raised high, and screaming, 'Ya ustad, why here, why in the orchards, why among our houses?' She calls Saddam ustad – imagine using that polite term when the world is exploding around us. We discovered later from the BBC that it was a Scud missile, launches from a mobile truck. It landed in Bahrain. At the time we couldn't decided whether it was a plane, a missile or a rocket, or even whether it was coming or going. For the first time since the war began, I thought I was all over for us. I'm sure that if its trajectory had been a few metres different we would all have been incinerated. It was like watching a rocket launch from Cape Canaveral, except this was no television and we were underneath the blast.

Immediately afterwards and while we were still outside, Ma takes me aside and whispers to me hoarsely, 'This is all your fault because you said that the Americans have no culture.' Honestly, she's quite batty sometimes. Talk about paranoia. Meanwhile, next door in Dood's house, Najul had thrown herself on top of little Zaynab, and Saysoon had thrown herself on top of them. Then Zaynab's voice was heard saying she wanted to get up. Najul said no, and the answer came back, 'In that case, I'm going to pee in my pants.' Zaynab's reaction to every air raid was to want to pee.



Wally Hedrick, *Rhonda*, 1970, 1992, 2002

Riverbend

# Baghdad is Burning

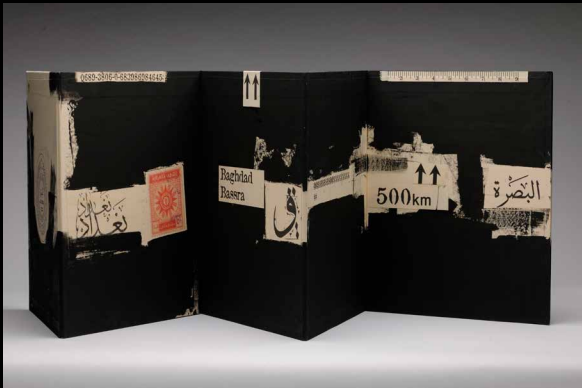
So this is the beginning for me, I guess. I never thought I'd start my own weblog... All I could think, every time I wanted to start one was “but who will read it?” I guess I've got nothing to lose... but I'm warning you – expect a lot of complaining and ranting.

I looked for a ‘rantlog’ but this is the best Google came up with. A little bit about myself: I'm female, Iraqi and 24. I survived the war. That's all you need to know. It's all that matters these days anyway. — Riverbend

**Sunday, August 17, 2003**  
Waking Up

Waking up anywhere in Iraq these days is a trial. It happens in one of two ways: either slowly, or with a jolt. The slow process works like this: you're hanging in a place on the edge of consciousness, mentally grabbing at the fading fragments of a dream... something creeps up around, all over you- like a fog. A warm heavy fog. It's the heat... 120 F on the cooler nights. Your eyes flutter open and they search the dark in dismay – the electricity has gone off. The ceiling fan is slowing down and you are now fully awake. Trying to sleep in the stifling heat is about as productive as trying to wish the ceiling fan into motion with your brain. Impossible.

The other way to wake up, is to be jolted into reality with the sound of a gun-shot, explosion or yelling. You sit up, horrified and panicked, any dream or nightmare shattered to oblivion. What can it be? A burglar? A gang of looters? An attack? A bomb? Or maybe it's just an American midnight raid?



Artist, Title, YEAR

# Historical Destruction in a Forgotten War

*Zainab Bahrani*

“We have already buried them. They can no longer be counted.”  
—General Norman Schwarzkopf<sup>1</sup>

“The non-will to know is part of the non-war.”  
—Jean Baudrillard<sup>2</sup>

IN APRIL 2003, as the Iraqi state capitulated to the invading US and coalition forces, one of the first decisions made by the US Central Command was to base their forces in government locations. These included many cultural and archaeological sites as well as major monuments. Among the heritage sites and historical monuments occupied by US troops in the aftermath of the ground war was the Shaheed Monument, a war memorial in Baghdad designed by the Iraqi artist Ismail Fattah al Turk (fig. 1). The forty-meter high design, a fractured turquoise dome divided into two halves to be read as part of an original whole,

1 Norman Schwarzkopf quoted in Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 74.  
2 Baudrillard, *The Gulf War*, 74

THEATER OF OPERATIONS 215



Artist, Title, YEAR



Fig. 1—Caption here for Shaheed Monument designed by Iraqi Fatta al Turk

appears as if riven by the ruthlessness of war. Al Turk’s monument, erected in 1983, was conceived as a memorial for those who had died—conscript soldiers from an unwilling population by the Baathist regime—in the long and brutal Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988). However, in time, the monument also came to stand in memoriam the dead soldiers of the 1991 Gulf War. In 2003, US troops took over the Shaheed Memorial, stationing their military base inside the architectural structure and surrounding complex, while desecrating the site. Inside the cenotaph, the inscribed names of the fallen and missing Iraqi soldiers were defaced by US soldiers with markers of the latter’s victory. The memorial museum and circular platform of the monument that extends into the Tigris river were damaged when the US military converted the site to a motor pool for their 150-thousand-pound Abrams tanks. The names of Iraqi draftees in the 1991 Gulf War, whose deaths were neither tracked by the US forces nor fully recorded in Iraq, had also been inscribed at the Shaheed Monument as a memorial of mourning and remem-

THE GULF WARS 1991–2011 217

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10

