

Restoring the power of the image: A photo from the series *Why Mister, Why?* Iraq 2003–2004, by renowned photojournalist Geert van Kesteren. The series is a moving and nuanced reportage of the American invasion of Iraq.



photo sources/Seamus Kealy

Shadow play

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As you're reading this, somewhere there is a war going on. Someone is dropping a bomb somewhere. Torn families and communities, executions, genocide — do all these stories get told? Do they have embedded reporters, *Fox News*, or Christiane Amanpour to spout off their stories to the world?

Signals in the Dark: Art in the Shadow of War, is an ambitious and expansive inter-disciplinary project in collaboration between UTM's **Blackwood Gallery** and the **Justina M. Barnicke Gallery** at Hart House on the St. George campus. It explores the idea of war, its attached, sometimes hidden or manipulated imagery and relatedness to power, politics and military aesthetics.

Showcasing seventeen artists working in and from all parts of the ever-shrinking world, their works via contemporary media are as unique as their point of view. Using the same media in their expression as those used to combat or conduct terror-photography, video and film, the artists manipulate this usage to counter government-produced thought and lazy viewership of warfare.

Ranging from traffic signs to audio/video installations, varying articulations of war usually not observed in mainstream media implore viewers to think, make connections and re-image what they already know.

Having opened last Wednesday, the exhibit is constantly changing with a forty-day film and video program that is in constant flux between Blackwood and Barnicke galleries. This coming Friday, a public symposium on "topics of war and geopolitical critique," will be held at the MiST theatre at UTM. This will lead into the Jan 30 screening of *In the Valley of Elah*, exploring the dehumanization of soldiers back from the Iraq war, directed by **Paul Harris**.

At Blackwood Gallery, visitors are greeted by a marble sculpture rendered in the form of a hooded detainee similar to those from the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. *Untitled* by **Abdel-Karim Khalil** reads 'We are the American Democracy,' in carved Arabic font at the base of the kneeling man. The juxtaposition between the humble sculpture and the grand and authoritative sign reading "VOUS ETES SORTIS DU SECTEUR AMÉRICAIN / YOU HAVE LEFT THE AMERICAN SECTOR" is jarring. This interplay sets the

tone for the rest of the exhibit which constantly explores the dualities between perceptions of East and West.

Through a series of graphite drawings spiraling into one another, **Kristan Horton's** *Drawing of a History of the First World War (Disc 1-3)* depicts war and all its appendages with incredible detail, precision and depth.

The monotone voice of the narrator and artist, **Sean Snyder**, as he speaks the words "Casio, Seiko, Sheraton, Toyota, Mars..." documents the otherwise mundane mention of Western amenities such as detergent, Spam and Mars bars. Almost like paparazzi shots, the DVD still zooms in on pixelated images and logos common in a Western context yet eerily ironic in others.

Paul Chan's video installation in the CCT E-Gallery titled *Tin Drum Trilogy* is about 115 minutes long and features edited takes on images, commentary and sound. Using distortion, repetition and sound, Chan's video sparks debate about a possible video of a beheading among a colleague.

Stars and Stripes, by **Dominique Blain**, are a series of silkscreen-on-canvas installation tapestries featured on the second and third floor ceilings of the CCT building, imploring viewers to think not only about the sets of black and white photographs — with rows of World War II bombers set against rows of beauty pageant contestants — but also about the division by means of a bold red cross stripe similar to a flag-style. Also in CCT, the Video Wall will feature various videos for the duration of the exhibit.

Appealing to a slew of students and community members, reaction to the exhibit has been positive to say the least. The overheard reaction to certain exhibits has ranged from "that's really interesting," to "I had no idea." The art challenges, like an enemy combatant, the ideals of those willing to be engaged. With an excited curator, **Seamus Kealy**, and timely subject matter, *Signals* will surely provoke and prod our perceptions of what we think to be truly democratic, honest and fair. Although over-saturated with war coverage in our everyday lives, perhaps the truest form of reporting happens without network affiliation.

Signals in the Dark: Art in the Shadow of War runs until March 2. There is no cost of admission to all on-campus events. Visit www.blackwoodgallery.ca for more details, dates and information on the upcoming symposium.



Abdel-Karim Khalil, *Untitled*, 2004. Marble, 45x24x16cm.