

Catalyst

Contemporary Art and War



An exhibition at IWM North
12 October 2013 – 23 February 2013



Blast, Jack Milroy, 1996 bookwork
Collection IWM. © Jack Milroy

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Introduction

What do artists contribute to our perceptions of war and conflict in a time when our general understanding of conflict is increasingly shaped by the media and the internet?

Working outside the pressures of journalism, artists can propose ideas, urging the viewer to think deeply about what war is, about its immediate impact, its long term repercussions and how we remember it. They invite us to consider our definition of conflict in a time when war no longer has easily defined geographical limits. Often taking their personal history as a starting point, many artists navigate this broad-ranging subject matter as observers, activists or philosophers.

At a time when there is a growing emphasis on the media spectacle and an expectation of immediate access to events as they unfold, this exhibition takes works from IWM's unique art collection and explores the rich, varied and moving artistic response to conflict in a media age.

IWM holds an unrivalled collection of twentieth and twenty-first century British art and this is the first major exhibition of IWM's collection of contemporary art produced since the First Gulf War - placing more than 20 years of work by over 40 artists in this national collection on public display together for the first time.

Accompanying the work on display there is a series of new interviews, specially commissioned by IWM, with artists whose work is on display, including Paul Seawright, Kennard Phillips, Annabel Dover and Langlands & Bell. A full transcript of all these interviews can be found at the end of this catalogue.

About Commissioned Artists

The first British official War Artists' Scheme was set up by the Government in 1916, during the First World War. A larger scheme was established under the War Artists Advisory Committee during the Second World War, resulting in over 3,000 commissioned works being given to the Imperial War Museum.

Building on this tradition, IWM has commissioned high profile contemporary artists through the Art Commissions Committee (ACC) since the early 1970s. Initially artists were commissioned to create work of a documentary nature, but in the last twenty-five years there has been a shift towards a more personal, artistic response to conflict.

Today our commissioning relates to all aspects of British and Commonwealth Forces' activities, including their role as part of United Nations military, humanitarian or civilian operations. IWM commissioned artists are not always embedded within the military; some have worked with non-governmental organisations, while others have worked independently.



Jack Milroy

Blast

Glasgow-born Milroy has worked with a range of found materials, especially books, maps and printed ephemera. He has produced a number of exploding bookworks, like the one shown here. Milroy says that he avoids too close an examination of his artistic motivations in case it makes his work too literal. His playful creations often rely on a sense of surrealism and serendipity. Influenced by Pop Art, here his minimal intervention transforms the dry technical detail of this book into an explosion of the weapons that lay dormant between its covers.

1996 bookwork

Collection IWM. © Jack Milroy

Navigating the Media War

Although historically parts of the media have been used to distribute wartime propaganda, in recent years the media has become an acknowledged weapon of battle.

Many artists have responded to this, questioning and confronting the media and its role in conflict head-on. They adopt or mock its style and methods to make a political point or to highlight the power of propaganda. Others produce art that rejects the mainstream media's need for spectacle, while some artists' work is shaped by imagery from news reports, TV or advertising. Several artists highlight the discrepancies between personal experience and the media's perspective in their work.

Art can prompt us to consider the ways in which the media not only influences our current perceptions of conflict, but also how it shapes the way in which the history is written.

Paul Seawright

Top to bottom

Camp Boundary

Mounds

In 2002, IWM commissioned Paul Seawright to respond to the War in Afghanistan, which had started the previous October. He was interested in how an artist might engage with conflict in a way that was different to the dramatic spectacles of photojournalism. The resulting photographs of minefields show a seemingly empty landscape, which in reality is both lethal and inaccessible. He says that he had 'always been fascinated by the invisible, the unseen, the subject matter that doesn't easily present itself to the camera'. Seawright's work highlights the changing nature of contemporary warfare with its increasing emphasis on remote technology and hidden enemies.

2002 Cibachrome print
Commissioned by the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum

Collection IWM. © Paul Seawright





Christiane Baumgartner

Game Over

Christiane Baumgartner's print combines the contemporary and the traditional. Using the age-old technique of woodcut, the German artist has transformed a still from a videoed documentary about the Second World War into a strangely contemporary image of war. The sequence of reproduction that has taken place – the original filming of the event, the use of this footage in a documentary, the subsequent artist's video and finally the woodcut – capture a sense of how contemporary conflict can seem distant and unreal when portrayed by the media. The title suggests the culmination of a computer game, another reference to simulation and unreality, further emphasising our sense of detachment.

2011 woodcut on paper

Collection IWM. © Christiane Baumgartner, courtesy Alan Cristea Gallery

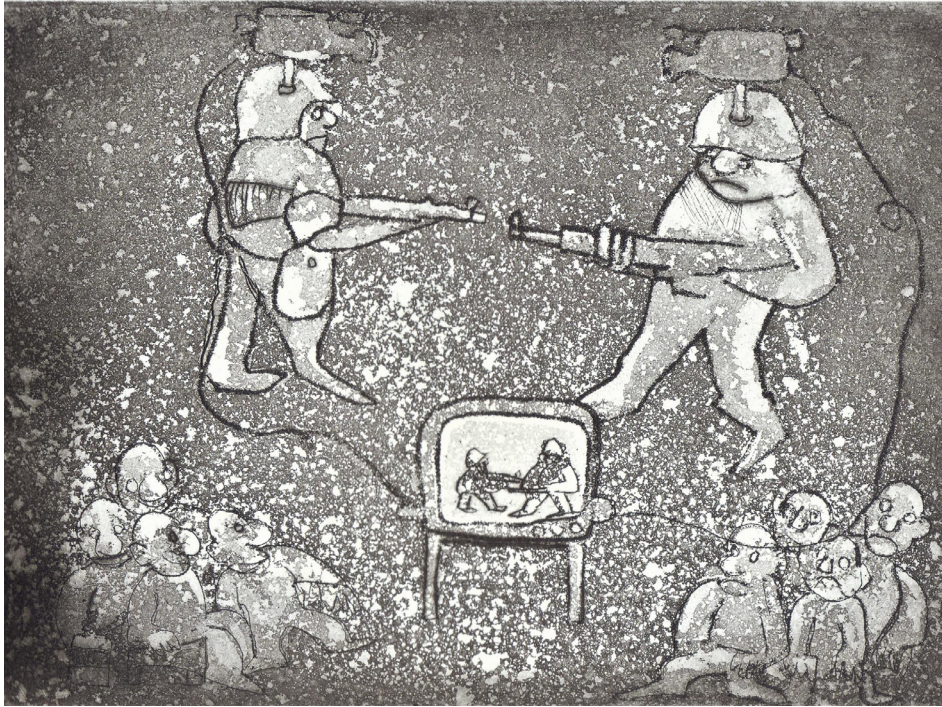
Yaron Livay

Pandora's Box: The Media War

Yaron Livay is an Israeli artist, based in both Israel and the UK. He worked as an accountant before setting up *Flying Sugar Press*, specialising in artists' books and prints. This is an unusually political work for Livay, produced in response to the Gulf War. Livay highlights the role played by the media in the conflict, portraying a war apparently acted out for a divided television audience. Although Livay's style conveys a dark humour, his message is bleak. The piles of bodies in his black cloth-bound book are a grim reminder of the reality of this supposedly virtual war.

1991 artist's book

Collection IWM. © Yaron Livay www.yaronlivay.com



Rasheed Araeen

White Stallion

London-based Araeen was visiting Pakistan during the Gulf War in 1991 and watched the early stages of the war on CNN news. Saddam Hussein enjoyed wide support in Pakistan and a poster of him riding a white horse sold two million copies there. Araeen superimposed this image of Hussein over a photograph of a television screen showing General Schwartzkopf, the US Commander-in-Chief, giving a press conference. Hussein appears to be signalling defiance, but the surrounding cross of planes threaten his bravado. The image of Hussein refers to both Islamic and Western historical sources. Through these layers Araeen demonstrates that propaganda relies on cultural associations, but undermines this by highlighting the cross-cultural origins of our points of reference.

1991 collage and photographs on board,
and painted wood panels

Collection IWM. © Rasheed Araeen





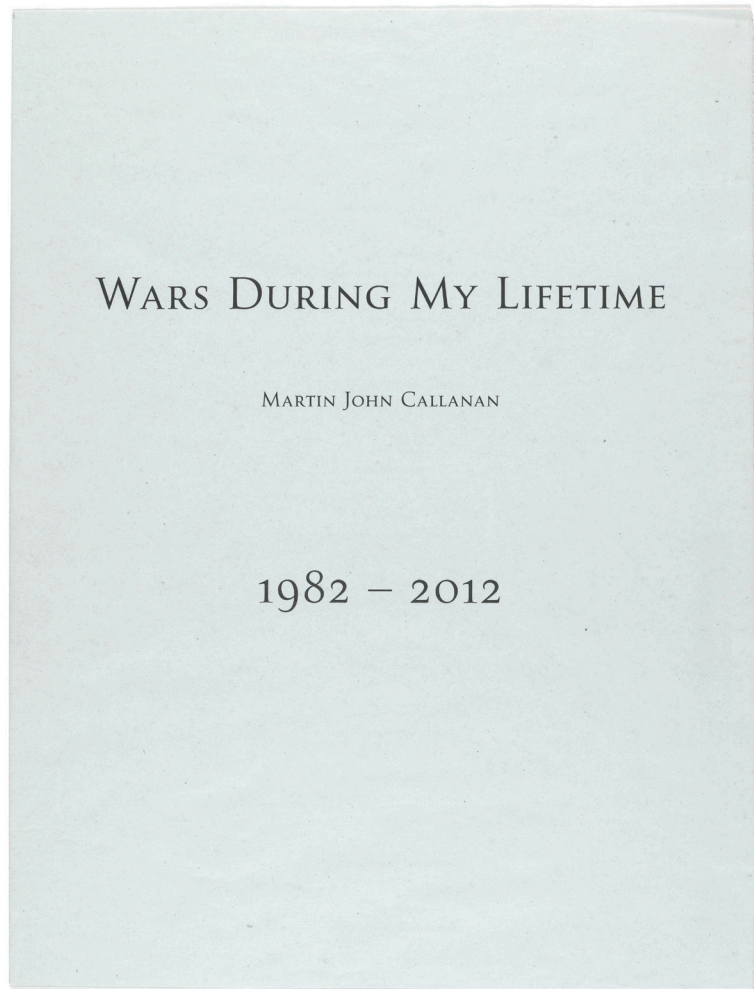
John Timberlake

Another Country XV

Timberlake's *Another Country* series began with a painted backdrop, combining well-known Romantic landscapes by Turner or Constable with nuclear mushroom clouds, taken from sources in IWM's archives. He then constructed models with plastic spectators and photographed the resulting diorama. Through the photographs he explores ideas about landscape and the modern day 'sublime', a term used to describe entities which are both terrifying and awe-inspiring. These qualities of scale, drama, shock and spectacle are features that are increasingly seen in the media's portrayal of contemporary conflict. Here the cloud is both toxic and fascinating, almost beautiful. The multiple layers in the work remove us from the event, leaving us as passive spectators, simultaneously seduced and disturbed.

2001 C-type print

Collection IWM. © John Timberlake



Martin John Callanan

Wars During My Lifetime, 1982-2012

Callanan is an artist with an ongoing interest in the individual's place within wider systems. In this newspaper he lists, in order, all the wars that have taken place during his lifetime. Since making this work he has made additional editions of the work with updated lists including subsequent conflicts. Through this simple gesture he reinstates the place of the individual within the broader sweep of history, using his own lifetime as a unit with which to measure historical events. On reading the list, some of the conflicts are immediately recognisable, while others have largely passed under the Western media's radar.

2012 artist's book

Collection IWM. © Martin John Callanan



Kerry Tribe

The Last Soviet

American artist Kerry Tribe's film tells the story of Sergei Krikalev, 'the last Soviet', a cosmonaut who was aboard the Mir space station for several months during the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The film restages the moment that Krikalev opened a parcel of autumn leaves supposedly sent to him with a shipment of supplies. This is mixed with the footage of *Swan Lake* that was played on Russian television to conceal news of the political turmoil on the streets of Moscow. The voices of two narrators are woven together, suggesting a documentary. However, the timing of these voice-overs and the images are mismatched, unsettling the viewer and highlighting the way in which the story is told and constructed. Tribe poses questions about the innocence of the media, about truth and fiction and the reliability of memory and history.



Commissioned by Modern Art Oxford, Arnolfini, and Camden Art Centre as part of the 3 series: 3 artists/3 places/3 years. Generously donated by the artist and commissioning organisations through the Contemporary Art Society, 2010

2010 Video, 10 minutes 44 seconds

Collection IWM. © Kerry Tribe

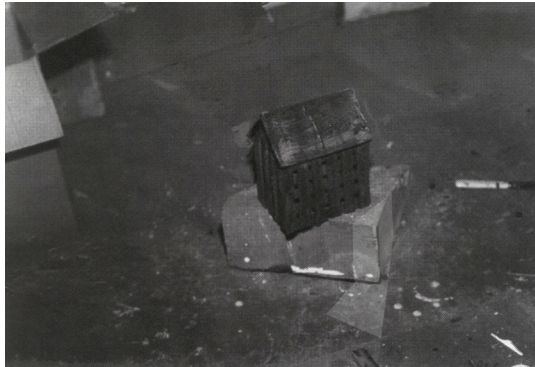
Paul Coldwell

Three lithographs from
With the Melting of the Snows

In 1996 Coldwell was working in his studio when he heard Martin Bell's final broadcast as the BBC war correspondent in Bosnia. Bell described the end of the war and how dark legacies of landmines and mass graves would come to light after the melting of the winter snow. In response Coldwell produced a series of prints in three chapters. The first chapter consists of expectant, journalistic landscapes; the second chapter shows apparently discarded, skeletal sculptures in Coldwell's studio; the third chapter is a series of images of dark suits, a reference to refugees fleeing with only their Sunday best. Coldwell's response aims to go beyond the over-saturated media images of the conflict, entering a more philosophical realm.

1998 lithograph on paper
Gift of the artist, 1998

Collection IWM. © Paul Coldwell



Albert Adams

Left to right, top to bottom
What... and When?

Iraq: Abu Ghraib

Iraq: Abu Ghraib

Born in racially segregated South Africa, Adams moved to Britain in 1953. Throughout his career he explored the ideas of both personal and political conflict. These drawings were inspired by the photographs and news reports of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2004. In the media these images became shorthand for the atrocity, but he avoids clichéd repetition of the images and instead explores wider themes of incarceration and violence, expressing a stark condemnation of human cruelty. One of the drawings shows an ape-like figure sitting on a stack of coffins. This figure often occurs in Adams's work, representing mankind's brutal instincts.

2006 charcoal on paper

Collection IWM. © Albert Adams Estate and Trust



Jananne Al-Ani

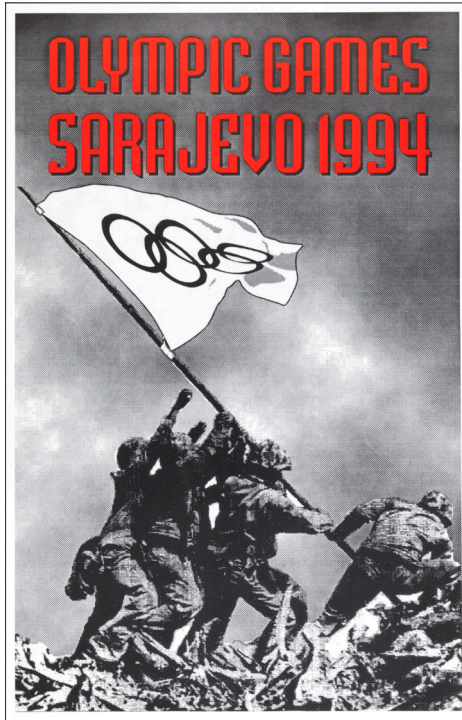
Untitled May 1991 (Gulf War Work)

Jananne Al-Ani was born in Iraq to an Arab father and an Irish mother. She has lived in Britain since 1980. Here she explores her reaction to the Gulf War in 1991, watching events develop through the media, and simultaneously as someone directly affected through her personal links to Iraq. The photographs are arranged to show cultural artefacts above family photographs, and formal portraits of her mother and sisters above media images of the conflict. These juxtapositions hint at the destruction of the artist's family history and national heritage. They also emphasise the complexity of events which are often simplified by the media into polar opposites of 'them' and 'us', good and evil.

1991 gelatin silver print

Collection IWM. © Jananne Al-Ani





Trio Sarajevo

Top to bottom

Olympic Games Sarajevo 1994

Enjoy Sara-jevo

Trio are a design practice made up of husband and wife Bojan and Dalida Hadžihalilović and their collaborator Lejla Hatt-Mulabegović. When war broke out in Bosnia in 1992, Trio found themselves trapped in the four year siege of Sarajevo. Isolated, they produced a series of darkly humorous postcards, drawing attention to the plight of the city and satirising icons of art, film and advertising such as the *Coca-Cola* logo, the *Mona Lisa*, Marilyn Monroe and the US flag being raised at Iwo Jima. The Olympics were a frequent theme in the series. In 1984, visitors had flocked to the Sarajevo Winter Olympics, but ten years later the city felt abandoned by the world. The postcard format was chosen for its portability, but later many designs were re-made as posters.



1994 lithograph on paper

1992 lithograph on paper

Collection IWM. © Trio Sarajevo



David Tartakover

United Colors Of Netanyahu

David Tartakover is an Israeli artist, designer and political activist who uses the medium of the poster, often satirising or re-appropriating visual symbols to present a politically provocative perspective on Israel. Here he uses an image of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, posing for a press call with his family, in a re-make of a *United Colors of Benetton* poster. It is a clear criticism of Netanyahu himself, who is often identified with an unwillingness to support the peace process with the Palestinians. The poster also implies that Israel militarises and fortifies her borders in order to maintain the illusion of a united, happy family.

1998 lithograph on paper
Gift of the artist

Collection IWM. © David Tartakover

Catalyst

Historically artists were employed to record wars by monarchs, religious leaders and governments. The resulting works were, more often than not, shaped by the commissioner. Many contemporary artists use art as a means to communicate a personal or political commentary.

Motivations can range from the artist's own social experiences and background to a manifestation of their political views or a desire to protest. Some artists aim to break down a dominant narrative and to propose a broader perspective. Artists can also be driven by an exploration of the legacy of their own family history and its resonances in the world today.

Art can reflect wider social and political viewpoints, asking us to think more deeply. It can reveal overlooked complexity and dilemmas. It can propose alternative ideas and provoke discussion, encouraging us to unpick the ways in which we think about current events.

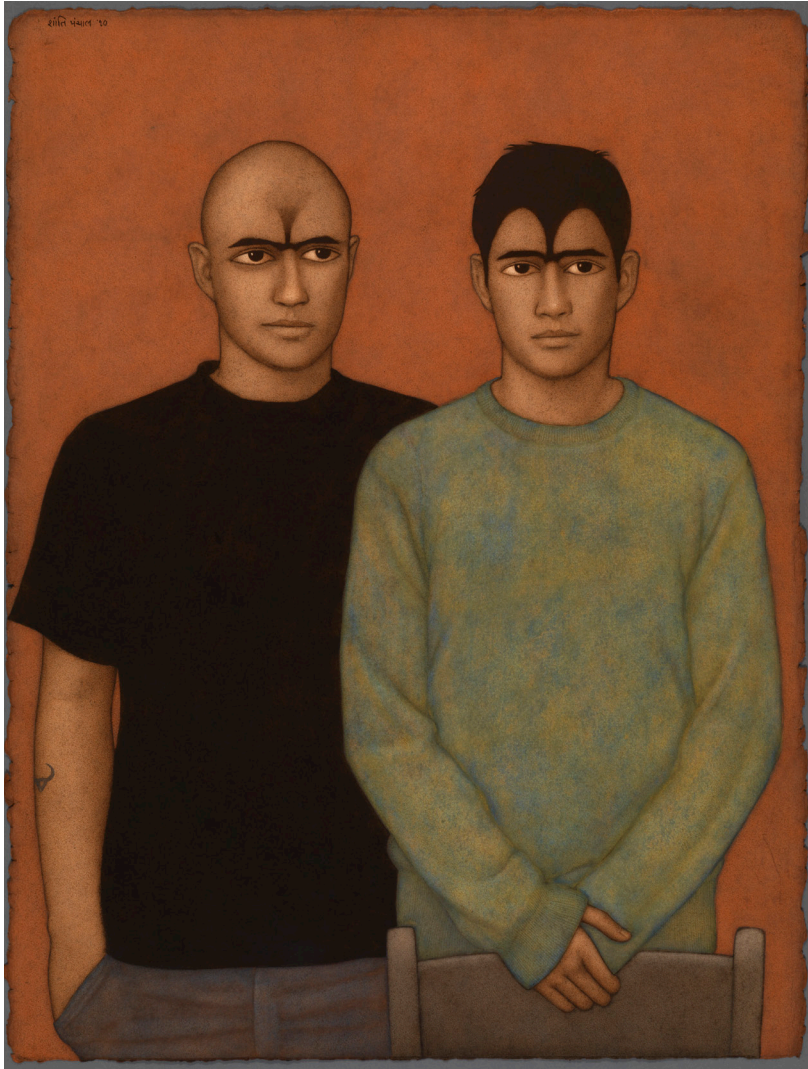
Shanti Panchal

Boys Return From Helmand

This is an intimate portrait of the sons of Indian-born, London-based artist Shanti Panchal. While this is a personal tribute to his sons, who both completed tours of duty in Afghanistan, the watercolour also addresses wider issues of British identity within contemporary conflict. Panchal's watercolours combine Indian and Western styles, capturing the complexities of a life lived between two cultures. This is echoed in the elder son's regimental tattoo, contrasting with the distinctive rendering of the boys' brows – a visual nod to Hinduism. This blend of references within the portrait alludes to the complex make-up and varied perspectives of the British armed forces.

2010 watercolour on paper

Collection IWM. © Shanti Panchal



Phill Hopkins

Drinker

Yorkshire-based artist Phill Hopkins produced a number of works in response to the Gulf War in 1991. These were shown at an exhibition, *Flyers*, in Leeds Art Gallery in the same year. Many of the works featured small, fragile-looking planes, destroyed in various scenarios. Hopkins uses found objects in his sculptures, assemblages and installations which often have the feeling of a three-dimensional manifestation of a drawing or sketch. Here a bird-like plane is greedily drinking oil from a ready-made bird feeder, implying the economic motivations behind the war: the need for oil from the Gulf.



1991 steel and plastic

Collection IWM. © Phill Hopkins

Taysir Batniji

GH0809: Houses #3, #9, #20, #28, #31

Taysir Batniji is a Palestinian artist, born in Gaza, but currently living in Paris. His work reflects on the situation in Palestine, but avoids the dramatic, drawing our attention instead to the irrationalities of the situation, to interrupted lives and restrictions on movement. *GH0809* is a tongue-in-cheek comment on the situation in Gaza, portraying houses bombed by the Israelis in 2008-9 through estate agents' information sheets. The text on the documents presents desirable residences and includes mundane details such as square footage and the number of rooms. It also quietly states the number of former residents for each house. We are not told what has happened to these people, but the damaged and ruined structures shown in the photographs reveal the bleak reality.



Al-Sammouni neighborhood,
Al-Zaytoun zone, south-east from the city of Gaza

Area: 200 m². Building on stilts (*mezallah*), open ground floor.
1st floor with 4 rooms, sitting room, kitchen, 2 bathrooms/w.c. Quiet,
beautiful view of an orchard in the back. Inhabitants: 8 people

GH0809



GH0809



GH0809

ArtFund

2010 mixed media
*Presented by the Art Fund and the
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
to IWM and Wolverhampton Art Gallery*

Collection IWM and Wolverhampton Art Gallery,
image © Taysir Batniji and © Galerie Eric Dupont, Paris.



John Keane

Death Squad

In 1990 Keane was commissioned as the IWM's *official recorder in the Gulf*, just before the fighting began in January 1991. At the time some critics suggested that an artist could not add to our understanding of a conflict already widely represented in the media. Others argued that the media coverage liberated Keane from the responsibility of producing an official record of the war; instead he was free to respond to events in a more personal and subjective way. His work was a characteristically cynical take on power, consumerism, technology and the media, often emphasising the dislocation of his experiences. The ambiguously titled *Death Squad* shows a group of soldiers carrying a body bag, their sunglasses and masks concealing any emotion or expression.

1991 oil on canvas
*Commissioned by the Trustees
of the Imperial War Museum*

Collection IWM. © IWM



kennardphillipps

Photo Op

kennardphillipps are Peter Kennard and Cat Picton-Phillipps who have worked together since 2002, initially to make art in response to the invasion of Iraq. Their work is shown in a range of contexts, on line, in galleries and on protest marches. They describe their work as an integral part of political activism, a direct means of communication: 'the visual arm of protest'. *Photo Op*, depicting Tony Blair taking a 'selfie' in front of a huge explosion, has become an iconic image. It was produced in response to the anger they felt at the Government's decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003, in the face of widespread public protest. They describe their need to create something that reflected and validated this public opposition, sentiments they felt were not reflected in the mainstream media at the time.

2007 pigment print on paper

Collection IWM. © kennardphillipps



Pierre Cavalan
Jen Townsend
Polly Wales

Left to right, top to bottom
Anti-War Medal
Pierre Cavalan
2004 mixed media

War Proliferates
Jen Townsend
2004 silver, onyx and rubber

The Wrong Heart Bleeds for War
Polly Wales
2004 gold, garnet and textile

Pierre Cavalan, Polly Wales and Jen Townsend adapted the traditional form of the war medal for a touring exhibition, staged in 2004, to protest against the Iraq War. Cavalan combines found enamel badges referencing petrol and oil with two skeletons, *memento mori*, suggesting that people are dying for oil. Wales addresses a similar theme by making a link between big business, represented by the pinstripe fabric, and the fish-hook with a garnet drop, suggesting spilled blood. Jen Townsend also links war and futile death, through a bullet wrapped in a mourning ribbon. The inscription, *war proliferates*, implies an endless cycle of violence.

Collection IWM. © Pierre Cavalan
Collection IWM. © Jen Townsend
Collection IWM. © Polly Wales

John Kindness

Sectarian Armour

Kindness's work from this period often explores the imagery of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. *Sectarian Armour* combines a denim jacket – in the Belfast-born artist's words, 'the uniform of the Belfast hard man' – with a traditional coat of armour. The object's historical appearance implies a sense of authority. The artist uses this to subvert symbols of Northern Irish sectarianism and highlight the absurdities of division. One side of the suit is adorned with British Loyalist imagery, the Queen and the bulldog. On the other side is Irish Republican iconography: the Virgin Mary, and an Ulster hog. The back of the suit shows a funeral; although the mourners are separated, they are united through their grief.



1994 gilded steel and etched brass

Collection IWM. © John Kindness



Annabel Dover

Left to right

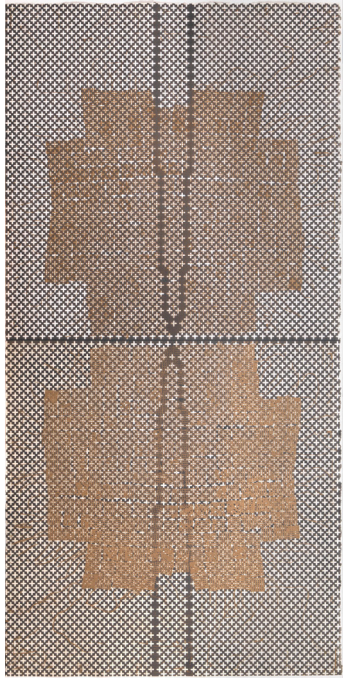
Cyanotype (RAF sock)

Cyanotype (hat)

Annabel Dover explores the relationship between objects and memory, and the social relationships that these objects represent. She highlights the power attributed to objects as markers of memory. These prints were produced from Second World War family keepsakes. The prints' distinctive colour comes from the method used in their production, in which an object is placed on treated paper and exposed to the sun, leaving a shadow. The items depicted belie the drama that they represent: the hat was worn by Dover's grandmother when she received a telegram stating that her husband was missing in action. The sock was worn by her stepfather when he was shot down and injured over Germany whilst serving with the RAF. His leg was amputated, but the nurses that cared for him washed and mended the sock. It became, for him, symbolic of their compassion.

2010 cyanotype on paper
Gift of the artist, 2011

Collection IWM. © Annabel Dover



Raymond Arnold

Left to right

Penetration Zen/When Two Bullets Collide

Blood and Bone/Haemorrhage Poem

Double Camouflage/The Last Veteran

Australian artist Raymond Arnold travelled to the Somme in France in 1998, following the path of his grandfather, a soldier in the First World War. Shown here are three of the resulting ten prints, a poetic response to the legacy of his family's experience. Arnold's printmaking process creates shapes, patterns and colours that make allusions to the frailty of the body, its protection and destruction, sexuality and death. The images have two intentionally different titles, preventing one definitive reading. One half of the title refers to the historical war, while the other signifies the artist's psychological state; one implicated in the story of the other.

1998 etching on paper

Collection IWM. © Raymond Arnold



Rozanne Hawksley

Pale Armistice

Rozanne Hawksley's delicate work often comprises assemblages of fragments of lace, wood, embroidery and bones. It tells stories of mourning, grief, commemoration and loss. Sometimes her work refers to tragedies in her own life or broader religious and literary narratives. *Pale Armistice* was created in memory of the artist's grandmother who was widowed during the First World War and worked as a seamstress, making naval uniforms. Through the traditionally 'feminine' medium of textiles, Hawksley articulates the hidden suffering of women bereaved during the First World War.

1991 plastic flowers, textile, silk, bone, metal

Collection IWM. © Rozanne Hawksley

Landscape of Memory

In order to go beyond the sensationalism of the front page many artists have sought alternative means of representing the trauma of war. Some go further than this to explore the far-reaching legacy of violence or less tangible concepts such as memory and loss.

Many artists who investigate these subjects use photography as a means of referencing and probing the medium's traditional association with preserving memories. They are also searching for new ways to use photographic imagery, questioning the approaches employed by mainstream war photographers.

Much of this work looks at the links between events, landscape and memory. Often traces in the landscape are used as metaphors for past events, while the absence of shocking imagery evokes a sense of loss or unease.

By exploring the nature of individual and collective memory, we are encouraged to consider how the repercussions of past conflicts can shape the way we think today.



Chris Harrison

Sites of Memory: Sheerness, Kent

This image is from a series of photographs of First World War memorials that Harrison took as he travelled in Britain. The unsentimental images explore the relationship between these shared markers of collective or personal memory and their surroundings. Frequently the images highlight the incongruity of the juxtaposition between past and present, the monuments surrounded by more recent buildings, overgrown greenery and street furniture, emphasising the passage of time. Often the banality of the surroundings sits uncomfortably with the gravity of the events memorialised, suggesting the fading of collective memory and dwindling recognition of these previously resonant structures.

1995 Cibachrome print
Gift of the artist, 2000

Collection IWM. © Chris Harrison

Angus Boulton

Left to right, top to bottom

*Gymnasium, Garde Ulanen II,
Potsdam. 23.10.98*

Cinema mural, Kramnitz. 16.3.99

Gymnasium, Rangsdorf. 28.10.99

*'Hold high the banner of army sport'.
Gymnasium II, Kramnitz. 17.10.00*

*Operating theatre, Lazarett,
Jüterbog. 26.10.00*

Gymnasium II, Forst Zinna. 31.10.00

Between 1998 and 2006, Angus Boulton took a series of photographs at Soviet military bases in and around Berlin. Abandoned when Soviet forces left East Germany, many were soon to be demolished. One of these series was a survey of the gymnasia on these sites. While the photographs have a strong formal quality, emphasising the almost archaeological approach taken by the artist, they also convey a strong sense of absence and the texture of decay. The sites stand not only as witnesses to the activities of their former inhabitants, but also as a manifestation of a belief system, its downfall and disappearing legacy.

2000 C-type print

Bottom row, Gift of the artist, 2000

Collection IWM. © Angus Boulton



Willie Doherty

Unapproved Road 2

Throughout his career Willie Doherty has explored the portrayal of his native Northern Ireland in the media and in broader visual culture. In doing this he also raises questions about the manipulative power of photography. *Unapproved Road* shows a makeshift roadblock, seemingly harmless at first glance. But once we know that this is a border road in rural Northern Ireland, the scene takes on a broader, darker significance. The photograph has a staged quality, calling into question our perception of the image. The position of the cement blocks suggests an impact, perhaps an indication of a violent past event. They are also interventions in the landscape, blocking the route and reminding us of the significance of land and territory in the conflict in Northern Ireland.

1995 Cibachrome print

Collection IWM. © Willie Doherty





Darren Almond

Border

During the period in which this work was produced, British artist Darren Almond made several works around the theme of Oświęcim, more commonly known as Auschwitz. Many of these projects involved re-contextualising mundane markers from the town, for example showing the town's bus stops in a Dusseldorf gallery. Here the entry and exit signs of Oświęcim are transplanted. On the one hand everyday objects, they also mark the boundary of a place loaded with a dark history. Removed from that place the signs become divorced from their context and significance. The visitor can choose to move between them, to engage or not engage with their history.

1999 mixed media

Collection IWM. © Darren Almond

Ori Gersht

Will You Dance For Me

Ori Gersht's film is inspired by the story of Yehudit Arnon, a prisoner in Auschwitz during the Second World War, who was ordered to dance at an SS officer's Christmas party. On refusing she was forced to stand outside, barefoot in the snow for hours. She pledged that if she survived she would devote her life to dance. Now, aged 85, she sits, rocking in and out of the light, as a barren snowscape appears, alluding to the site of her memories. The rhythmic rocking of her chair emphasises the passage of times, linking past and present. Towards the end of the piece, Arnon begins to move in a way that suggests that she is suffering, but simultaneously that her defiance and spirit endure.

2011 Dual channel HD video projection,
13 minutes 45 seconds

Collection IWM. © Ori Gersht





Mirosław Balka

A Crossroads in A. (North, West, South, East)

Polish artist Mirosław Balka is best known for stark installations dealing with Polish history, often referencing Auschwitz and Treblinka concentration camps. This portfolio of four prints reflects on the Holocaust and on the nature of memory, recollection and history. The prints are titled *North*, *South*, *East* and *West*, referring to the direction of the roads depicted. Each image shows a corner of a crossroads in Auschwitz. All identifying aspects of the location or human presence are obliterated by the artist, leaving blank, empty spaces. By removing these traces Balka questions whether it is possible to remember or memorialise the full horror of the Holocaust. Simultaneously the terrible presence of what is missing hangs heavily over the viewer.

2006 lithograph on paper

Collection IWM. © Mirosław Balka

Frauke Eigen

From *Fundstücke Kosovo 2000*
[*Kosovo Finds 2000*]

German artist Frauke Eigen travelled to Kosovo in 2000, shortly after the end of the 16 month war there. She heard that a mass grave containing the bodies of genocide victims was being uncovered near to where she was working. Although Eigen was in Kosovo working as a photojournalist, here she adopted a different approach. Witnessing the recovery operation, she was struck by the power of the personal possessions removed from the grave and the strong sense they gave of their owners' absence. She intentionally avoids graphic imagery in her photographs and leaves it to the viewer to complete the story.

2000 gelatin silver print

Collection IWM. © Frauke Eigen



Ori Gersht

Vital Signs

London-based Israeli artist Ori Gersht often explores the relationship between history, memory and landscape in his work. Part of a series called *Afterwars*, *Vital Signs* is a photograph of Sarajevo taken after the end of the war in Bosnia. The media interest in the conflict was enormous, but had dwindled by the point Gersht arrived. He hoped to explore the longer-term impact of the conflict on the city and the population. There is mortar damage on the concrete wall above the pool, alluding to the far-reaching repercussions of conflict, but in contrast, the overall feeling is one of optimism and rejuvenation, signs of normal life returning to the city.

1999 C-type print

Collection IWM. © Ori Gersht



Jim Naughten

From *Re-enactors*:

Left to right, top to bottom

Civilian with black fox fur

Norland Panzer Grenadier

Hitler Jugend

Jim Naughten's photographs are a series of unnerving portraits of First and Second World War historical re-enactors. Naughten, a London-based photographer, set up a makeshift studio at a re-enactment event in Kent. His sitters' costumes are precise in their detail, but they themselves appear to gaze beyond the viewer into another time. The period and place in the photograph are ambiguous and this disconcerting effect gives the viewer the feeling that they are looking at both the past and present simultaneously. Naughten tells us nothing of his sitters' lives, nor does he express a view on their activities, but raises questions about collective perceptions of history and our own relationship with the past.

2010 C-type print
Gift of the artist, 2010

Collection IWM. © Jim Naughten





Steve McQueen

Queen and Country

Queen and Country is a work that commemorates the individual British service personnel who died during the Iraq War, but also questions ideas of sacrifice, community and nationhood. McQueen was commissioned by IWM in 2003 and visited Iraq shortly afterwards to research ideas for a work. Best known as a filmmaker, McQueen was frustrated by the limited opportunities to film in Basra and sought alternative means to respond to the conflict. He hoped that eventually the portraits, selected by the families of the deceased, would be issued as stamps and, as he states, 'enter the lifeblood of the country'.

ArtFund

2006 mixed media

*Commissioned by the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum
Presented by the Art Fund*

Collection IWM. © Steve McQueen

Shifting Fronts

From the Cold War to the 'War on Terror', shifts in how wars are fought and developments in technology have changed the way in which we perceive conflict. When drones can be controlled over thousands of miles and terrorism can be home-grown, war is no longer confined to geographical boundaries and often has no clear beginning and end.

Artists have drawn on these changes and this has had an impact on the way that war has been visually represented. Many artists are exploring the visual language of weaponry and technology, revealing the virtual, technological and physical networks now at work. They pose probing questions about the clash of culture in this new war zone: who and where is the enemy? And what, if any, are the rules of engagement?

Art can reveal unexpected perspectives on politics and ethics while stimulating discussion of these sometimes abstract issues.

The House of Osama bin Laden

In 2002, Langlands & Bell were commissioned by IWM to respond to the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and the War in Afghanistan. They had heard rumours about the abandoned home of Osama bin Laden in Daruntah, near Jalalabad, eastern Afghanistan. Through contacts they made while travelling in the country they managed to find and photograph the house, now used as a base by a local militia. Adopting the language of computer games, they produced this interactive animation from their photographs. The viewer, like the military at the time, performs a fruitless hunt for bin Laden, highlighting how a small compound in Afghanistan is linked by a chain of events to the towers of the World Trade Center through the September 11 attacks on the USA.

2003 interactive computer animation / data projection
*Commissioned by the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum
Courtesy Langlands & Bell and V/SpaceLAB*

© Langlands & Bell and V/SpaceLAB





Peter Kennard

@earth

Peter Kennard has worked with collage as a means of bringing art and politics together since the 1970s. @earth combines iconic earlier work with new images, produced with Tarek Salhany. Purely visual, it avoids language in order to speak to a global audience. Organised into chapters exploring war, global poverty, the environment, oil, surveillance, weaponry and Palestine, it presents a shocking narrative, implying the interconnectedness of world events, greed and suffering. This page shows a *Google Earth* image of Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, overlaid by a haunting medal, its stars and stripes ribbon frayed and dirty, the medallion replaced by the head of a hooded prisoner.

2011 artist's book

Collection IWM. © Peter Kennard

Langlands & Bell

From *world wide web.af*:

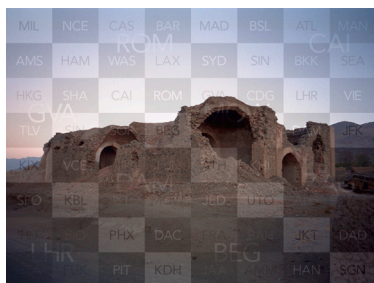
Left to right, top to bottom

Ruined Monument; Black Hawks; Ruined Palace, Dar ul Aman; Graveyard; The Boneyard; Dump; Bunker Wall; The Bunker

These prints build on the work that Langlands & Bell produced during their IWM commission on Afghanistan in 2002. Following their visit they talked of their surprise at the number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in the area. Their presence inspired *world wide web.af*, comprising photographs of war debris and ruined buildings taken by the artists. Superimposed over the photographs are grids containing acronyms for NGOs, for security services, for terrorist and banned organisations, aviation codes and the top-level domain names of countries involved in the War in Afghanistan. The artists' previous practice has explored global systems of circulation and exchange. Here they highlight the physical and virtual networks at work in the war zone.

2004 archival inkjet print

Collection IWM. © Langlands & Bell





Mark Neville

Child, Jacket, Slaughtered Goat, Sweets, Painted Nails, Xmas Day, Helmand

Commissioned by the Colchester gallery, *firstsite*, in association with IWM, Mark Neville spent the winter of 2010-11 in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, with 16 Air Assault Brigade. He made several films and a series of photographs. In this image, taken at a checkpoint on Christmas Day, an Afghan child is wearing a jacket distributed by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to local families and a Santa hat. He is eating sweets given to him from British Army rations, whilst in the background members of the Afghan National Security Forces are slaughtering a goat. Neville addresses the complex relationship between the local population and the ISAF forces, and how the meeting of different values and customs manifests itself on the ground in the war zone.

2010 C-type print

Collection IWM. © Mark Neville. Commissioned by *firstsite* Colchester and 16 Air Assault Brigade, in association with Imperial War Museum.

Edmund Clark

From *Guantanamo: If the Light Goes Out*

Left to right, top to bottom

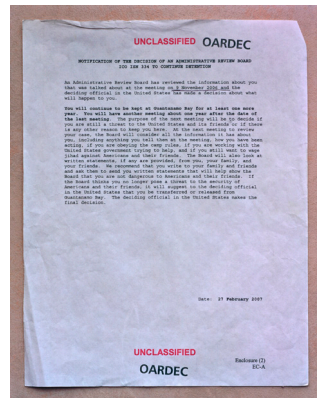
Camp 1, Isolation unit

Prison Camp hospital, display of the product and tube used for force-feeding

Camp 4, arrow to Mecca and ring for ankle shackles

Ex-detainee's home in UK after Guantanamo

Letter of release review and refusal to unnamed prisoner



British photographer Edmund Clark has frequently addressed official structures of control in his work. In 2009 he was granted unique access to the US naval base and prison camps at Guantanamo Bay. In the resulting work, he focused on re-humanising perceptions of the men held there through an investigation of the concept of 'home', photographing the camps that house detainees, the quarters of the US military on the base, and former detainees' home environments after Guantanamo. Intentionally disjointed, the series evokes the disorientation inherent to the sensory deprivation techniques used in the prison camps and the covert or unseen activities that take place at Guantanamo. This is reinforced by the title of the series, a quote from a former detainee describing the psychological trauma he still experiences.

2009 C-type print

Collection IWM. © Edmund Clark

Alison Wilding

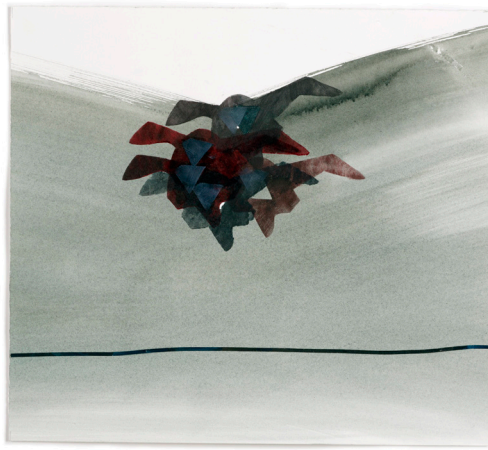
From the *Drone* series

Left to right, top to bottom
Numbers 4, 9, 1

Although she is best known as a sculptor, Alison Wilding's drawings have become an increasingly significant part of her practice. Her visual language is predominantly abstract, but many of her recent drawings make reference to recognisable forms of aerial vehicles, stealth bombers, missiles and, in this case, drones. Here Wilding does not make an overt political statement about the unmanned aircraft, which have become synonymous with contemporary conflict. She does, however, portray them as sinister bird-like silhouettes, suggesting creatures from a science fiction film rather than remotely controlled machines.

2012 acrylic inks and collage on paper
Drone No.1 Gift of Karsten Schubert, 2012

Collection IWM. © Alison Wilding



PAUL SEAWRIGHT

Why did you accept the IWM commission?

When I was first asked to put a proposal in for the IWM commission in 2001, my original instinct was to shy away from it. I've spent a long time, 20 years, criticising non-Northern Irish photographers and artists making work in Northern Ireland therefore the idea of me going to another country to do the same thing seemed like a, well it seemed like the wrong thing to do, but thinking about it more broadly, thinking about the kind of work that I make which is trying to think about the conflict from the language and the perspective of art practice, trying to take the idea of war being a dramatic and highly visual event and do something that's more deliberate, more quiet.

I thought perhaps I could do that in Afghanistan and that meant that I had to do a bit of research to try to find out if there was a project that could work where I wasn't going to be immersed in 'conflict situations' because it's very difficult to work in the way that I work, I've done that before but it was very, very difficult.

The broader context of my work is the idea of the unusual or the invisible so I was looking for something in the war out there that I could deal with, that I suppose didn't have the otherness of war. And it didn't take long to find of course not just the conflict that I went to in 2002 the recent

conflict but previous conflicts could be dealt with by doing something with battle sights and landmines and those things that were hidden or invisible in the theatre of war.

So what were your first impressions of Afghanistan?

When I got to Afghanistan, I mean my first impressions were, have you made a mistake, because, you've got to bear in mind, I flew into Pakistan, I mean even getting in there was very difficult. I didn't go with the military and I got on an Aid flight, UN Aid flight from Islamabad into Kabul only 12 of us on a UN flight. The people that were meant to meet me in the airport, of course which was controlled by the military, the airport of course was not open, they weren't there, they hadn't come. So this was not a place you could get a taxi but the UN people who were on the flight with me said come with us to the United Nations and we will try and find someone to come and get you.

So you know that first start kind of painted a picture for me of what it was going to be like, this was no ordinary place, it was literally, I mean I used to say to people it was the war coming to an end, to a close, which just seems terrible 10 years on, but at that time they were trying to draw things together, get back some sort of normality, but with a very particular context and the very first conversation I had was with one of the United Nations guys in the Land Rover on the way to the UN compound and

he said to me 'have you brought a weight lifting belt with you?' And I said no and he said 'oh if you're travelling around this country you're gonna need a weightlifting belt'. And I said 'why on earth...' and he said 'well your insides will be like porridge by the end of this, there are no roads, you know you will be ...' to travel 70 miles, and he goes 70 miles, 5 hours, a pothole bombed road, you'd have to continually go off the road and go across bits of desert, rough ground and back on again. It was really extraordinary your head bouncing off the ceiling of the Land Rover.

So that was the quick immersion, and then trying to contact the Halo Trust who were working with me over there from the UN compound to try and get someone to collect me, it was quite a rocky start.

What did you gain from working with charities rather than being in a more embedded situation?

We talked a lot before I went out about the logistics of going. I mean that was one of the most difficult things, the Imperial War Museum has a kind of long term commitment to these projects but making them happen is not always that easy and people imagine it's just the museum, just say to them take this person with you and they say yeah no problem. It's not quite like that, so there were a few options, one of the options would have been to be embedded with the military.

The idea of *embeddedness* was only just starting at that point, it hadn't really happened, bear in mind that previous to my visit, in June 2002 the early invasion, there had been no embedded photographers or reporters, that came afterwards and it was very much a feature of the Iraq war, Afghanistan in the early stages so that wasn't an easy thing to sell to the military.

It also turned out if we had have gone with the military you'd have been probably stuck with Kabul and the greater areas and Bagram, so very limited access to where you wanted to go. So it was riskier going with an NGO in a sense, in terms of danger riskier because you wouldn't have that kind of protection but the chance of getting access to the whole country were greater and in fact that was the key to this and other people, Simon Norfolk was there at the same time as I was there, but really didn't get beyond the greater confines of Kabul where I got down to Kandahar, up to Mazar you know which was really quite extraordinary to be able to have done that made quite a difference to the work.

The other thing about not working with the military is you are also not tied to their narrative or their discourse and that of course, I'd worked with security agencies before I did a piece of work with the RUC in Belfast. It's very difficult when you are with them and they are controlling what you do every day, to take control of your project and very, very difficult indeed, and I knew that if I ended up

having to go out on patrols with the military and having to follow their agenda I wouldn't get the project that I had planned to do and there would be no point going.

So finding an NGO was crucial and in fact a little article in *The Guardian* about me being commissioned and what I wanted to do and Halo Trust got in touch and said look we've got a team out there if you want to stay with us, which was really fantastic.

Could you describe the project that you eventually produced?

The project that I proposed was to go and photograph battle sites and areas that were heavily mined. I mean even at that time they were saying it would take a decade to clear the landmines in Afghanistan because there's landmines from generations of wars not just this war.

Unexploded cluster bombs, 10% of all cluster bombs don't detonate so they become defacto landmines. The idea was that in Belfast where I grew up I often tell the story that my wife and I when we first moved back there in the 1980s after studying at Art school over in England, there was a bomb just outside where we were living in our flat and it was a prison officer a bomb under his car and of course all the chaos of that moment ensues where the windows shake and break there's all the fire engines and police and so on but the next morning

you are walking to the bus stop and everything is just back to normal. There's a tiny scorch mark on the tarmac and that's it and that's the reality of living in that kind of place where there's conflict going on, the moment of the bomb or the riot or event is something that doesn't happen very often, it does happen. I guess I wanted to capture something of that on the surface things will look sort of normal. Now in Afghanistan that's not quite the case because the detritus of war is everywhere and the destruction was so great that it's very difficult not to make reference to that.

But I wanted to talk about the hidden nature not just of the landmines, that's certainly a feature, but it's not overt in the work, it's not a photo journalistic piece at all or editorial piece. I mean I was going there as an artist and that's a quite important distinction I guess, so it's not a story about landmines. Now I did do a radio programme while I was there and that allowed me to kind of deal with that. Because sometimes as an artist you are a bit frustrated that you can't open up a narrative enough, particularly with something so political and so difficult when you really want to say something overt and of course art practice doesn't allow for that and the radio programme was the outlet for that. It was a set of radio diaries I did which became a radio programme.

But the idea of the project was, the title was *Hidden*, that everything in contemporary conflict, that contemporary conflict at that time was hidden. So the idea was of course that bin Laden and his people were supposedly hidden somewhere in the mountains in Afghanistan, that the high level bombing of the allied forces, so the enemy were hidden so quite often those people being bombed would never see who was bombing them, that these bombs and mines underneath the ground were also hidden, so everything was in fact hidden in the conflict.

Now that changed in Iraq and the nature of warfare and its representation changed, but up until that point this idea of photographing conflict- it hadn't happened since Vietnam. And there's a real hiatus of time when contemporary conflict is not represented in that explicit way that it ended up being represented in Iraq for example, so I was also referring to that slightly, and I guess also that famous Baudrillard text from the first Gulf war you know where he writes that the Gulf war did not happen, you know, making the case that the technological aspect of the conflict meant nobody witnessed the war except through its ways of mediation. And the mediation was by on-board bomb cameras and so on, so I was thinking about all of those things and about how I could weave those into a project.

You have done lots of work about Northern Ireland and the Troubles in the past, an

environment with which you are very familiar, how was this different, to work in somewhere which was very unfamiliar?

Until that point certainly the work I had made in relation to conflict had been in Northern Ireland where I was born and brought up. The difference between that and working in somewhere like Afghanistan was not just the place but also the process, because if you know a place and you understand it, of course you the way you choose to represent it happens slowly and you respond to that environment very slowly.

The idea of going somewhere for a month is very different, where it's all very compacted, where you have to do all the research beforehand, imagine what you are going to find there and of course be surprised when the thing you imagined is not there, so that's very, very difficult.

I mean ironically the challenge of that, which could have been a real problem for me, became liberating and I have done similar projects to that ever since. The idea of going for one month trips is what I've been doing almost for a decade since the trip to Afghanistan, because the immersion in a place and a project really worked for me and I found that, once I'd got used to the idea of it, quite liberating. But not knowing the environment, not knowing the terrain, not knowing what you would find, not being able to plan for it slowly was difficult. I think the other challenge is that you develop a visual

way of working and a visual language in relation to the landscape you inhabit all the time and that's certainly the case within Northern Irish work. If you know my Northern Irish work, the landscape is always a very closed landscape, the view is always very occluded, there's not any space in the landscape. Very rarely do you see any sky, very claustrophobic kind of landscape and I think you imagine, you're not going to reinvent yourself when you make a new piece of work, that's a mistake I am always telling students don't try to reinvent yourself, your next piece of work should have threads from your last, I really wanted that to be the case.

But I arrived in Afghanistan on the first day with a camera heading to one of these sites. I thought oh no, I'm not going to be able to do this, it's not going to work, because the landscape, not only the light. The light I knew was going to be a challenge, because that warm that Eastern light, so I deliberately didn't photograph at the beginning and end of the day so I didn't have that but I wanted that bright cold harsh light. But actually the landscape is so huge there's nothing in the middle distance. So the landscape extends out so far that it's very difficult to make the kind of photographs that I would normally have made.

So the first actually four or five days I just thought this isn't going to work because I can't make the kind of landscape photographs I would normally make.

I think once I had given into that and realised it's not about the kind..., there must be other ways of doing this and giving in to it and just letting it take shape then it was fine, but it was initially a bit of a shock for me to make photographs that were so light so bright and had horizons and sky. All I could do after that was make photographs that had all of those elements but were still essentially empty and that is really what I to do.

Did your experiences in Afghanistan affect your practice?

Without a doubt the experience in Afghanistan changed, well it changed lots for me, it changed the way I make work. I previously I'd had always been working close to home so you would work slowly and still fully and regularly over an extended period of time, and this short concentrated burst was a very different way of working for me and it did change me. So subsequently, I mean the book I made, the show I did after Afghanistan was from two and a half years of trips to four sub-Saharan African cities, a kind of post colonial project about the cities over there. I did it in exactly the same way, six or seven one-month trips, not one, so I would go for 3 or 4 weeks at a time and make work then come back, and I have been working like that ever since. So it did, it changed the methodology for sure.

It also I think formally changed the way I make photographs, if you look at the *Volunteer* work,

which is photographs of military recruitment stations in America. I mean a lot of those photographs look very, very like the Afghanistan photographs, yet they are made in American cities, the idea being that the battle site doesn't have to be the battle site. So yes the photographs have more space in them than I used to, they're not so harsh and claustrophobic and I think generally a lot of those ideas that ran through that Afghanistan commission in the *Hidden* work, resonate in the bodies of work I have made since.

How do you see your role as an artist in relation to war and conflict?

Seamus Heaney, the poet, said not long after this trip in Afghanistan that he thought it was really crucial that people who would normally not find themselves in places of conflict, poets, playwrights, artists should be in these places because what they bring back is not the same as a military photographer, not the same as the photojournalist, and if that's all we have as an interrogation of these moments in history, that would be a problem.

Because historically of course creative practice of all kinds from dance and drama, theatre, art have lent wonderful voices to those debates about those things but to actually be in the theatre of war and respond to that, I think is a unique opportunity. I don't think you have to be there in the theatre of war and I've been making work without being there on other conflicts since, but I do think it's important

that artists open up to the idea about work about conflict. I think it's too easy for that kind of work to be simplistically critical and I think that's an important consideration for me.

Even in the work in Northern Ireland from the start I have always tried to present the complexity of the situation and not try to present me. I mean of course its subjective and a lot of the work has a reflexive element, but I am always trying to tread some kind of boundary which allows people from all perspectives access to the work and therefore are open to what it presents in terms of what they might think about that, and that's what I have continued to try to do.

I think my role as an artist who is dealing with conflict, not exclusively, I think I have also been dealing more recently with social fracture, which is a version of conflict, other things in society that are similar. I think it's really important, there's not enough artists that are making work about these things because they see it as too difficult.

Much of your work is not explicit in its context or narrative, the viewer has to piece it together, can you talk about this?

Sometimes my work would be criticised for not being direct enough, for it not being explicit, for it being too ambiguous, that the narrative is obscured or difficult. There's a fine balance there. I mean if it is too explicit then it becomes journalistic, I guess

if it's too ambiguous it becomes meaningless, so the holy grail is to make work that visually engages people, draws them in and then that gives itself up, gives it meaning up slowly. And I think good art does that, but still gives its meaning up, you have to still be able to access what you are talking about, and I think the work does that. Once you know its context, you know where the photographs are made, then each work is very resonant with all kinds of ideas. The exciting thing about art is, and the way people engage with art, is that the construction of meaning is not done by me, it's done by the person looking at the artwork. You must leave space for that to happen, if you don't then you really are back to an editorial picture in a magazine that, that has to function in a different way. It has to be quick and it has to give up its meaning quickly, because people will look at it for fifteen seconds then turn the page, so there has to be a difference between that and what you do as a photographic artist. But finding that line is I guess the challenge.

You have talked about your work suggesting an aftermath, you were in Afghanistan 11 years ago, has this changed how we might view your work?

For some time after I came back when I would go and talk about the work or give lectures about it I would talk about it being a piece of work about the aftermath of the conflict but of course it never ended and 11 years on is still as probably as difficult out there as it was when I was there.

I think also what's changed, the political situation out there has changed greatly since so I guess that in a way, I don't think it changes the work necessarily. I mean the work represents that time and still represents the conflict and actually more importantly represents conflict more broadly. It's not just about Afghanistan of course it's about war and the consequences of war on place.

I think the thing that's really changed is my internal narrative of what the work means because of course I can't divorce my experience of making the work and being there with the work itself. But of course the viewer will never see that so I think it doesn't complicate the work but it complicates my view of Afghanistan and the conversations I had with people there because, of course I do believe it should have ended and should be over, and at the time the people I met and the Afghan people I spent time with welcomed the invasion and I wouldn't think they would be welcoming the invasion ten years on.

I think one of the important distinctions in the work and one of the reasons I accepted the commission in the end despite my doubts about it, because what did I know about Afghanistan who am I as a person from Belfast to go to Afghanistan and come up with some kind of narrative about that place. I think that was my biggest challenge internally, you know how do you justify that and actually the way I not only justified it but the way the work turned out is that the work's not just about Afghanistan,

the work is about war and about the consequence of war and about what happens to place and space in the aftermath of war. And in fact when we did the invitations for the exhibition at the IWM and everything went out, at the last minute the museum realised it didn't mention Afghanistan, that the invite or the title of the show didn't say anything about Afghanistan and they had to print a little photocopied insert to say this is one of the Afghanistan commissions, and I liked that because actually this could be about any war anywhere in the Middle East or any conflict now or since and I think that's important. So it's about the legacy of conflict not just about the specificity of Afghanistan.

Can you talk a bit about the relationship of your work to media treatments of similar subjects. Is this something important to you? What does your work do that the press doesn't or can't do?

When people write about art practice in Northern Ireland in relation to the Troubles, one of the easy, maybe overly simplistic comparisons they make is art practice and particularly photographic art practice, my practice, is a response to the media representation of Northern Ireland. Actually there's a big show just on at the minute in Belfast called *Thirty years of Photography in Northern Ireland* and Colin Graham in the book, wonderful text in the book that accompanies that show, argues that is part of the narrative but it's only a small part of the story and there are many other factors. And I think that's true, it's a little bit over simplistic to say that

photographic art practice that deals with conflict and uses the language of fine art and contemporary art is a response to the media representation, but it is partially true.

As a young art student living in England looking at the representation of the place I'd grown up in, very frustrating because of course what accompanied that was me meeting people from England and them telling me what they thought of Northern Ireland, what they understood about it and actually it fitted in pretty broadly with the crude representation of the place. So that did unlock some things I guess, in terms of wanting to make a different response, but wasn't the whole picture. In fact Colin Graham argues that there's as much an aesthetic response, the kind of work that I made in the mid 1980s, *Sectarian Murder*, was as much a response to what was going on in photography at the time as it was responding to the media, and I think that's true.

But one of the other questions that a lot of people asked when I was given the commission and the museum fielded a lot of questions, saying why are you sending a photographer to Afghanistan because this is an artist commission, and we're always sending photographers to war, why do we need another photographer? And I hope that the work answers that itself because it's not the same kind of work that you would get from a photographer who had been to that place.

Its purpose, its context, its intent, the way the work is made, the way it is displayed, the way it presents its subject, all entirely different to that. I've said many times in this interview it adopts a very different language and therefore it's like comparing apples and oranges really, and the answer the Museum would have given is, it is an artist commission and we have chosen an artist not a photographer.

How do you want viewers to engage with your work? Is it ok for people to find these images beautiful?

When people look at the work, some of the images of course they are beautiful, they have a stark beauty to them. They're not beautiful in, I mean Simon Norfolk is an example, because Simon went the other way so he chose only to photograph in the first hour of the day and last hour of the day and to embrace that gorgeous light because he wanted to be beautiful. For me they couldn't be beautiful, war is not beautiful and these landscapes if you are in them are not beautiful and yet when you make the photographs, photography and what it does to the process of photographing a place, you can make it, you know, visually interesting, beautiful is a strong word.

And I would hope there's enough visual interest to draw people in, that's important because if there's nothing formally interesting or if it's a kind of anti-aesthetic then I think you, you don't really engage the viewer. When people are drawn in,

there's a photograph of camels wandering about in a minefield and just at my feet there's a line of red stones, so you know literally I cannot go one foot further forward. Yet the camera takes you into that space and in a sense that photograph is a fairly conventional photograph of a desert landscape with camels wandering across it but of course it's a lethal space, there's camel carcasses everywhere. You know I could have had a photograph with camel carcasses or wolf carcasses in the foreground but to show that almost romantic eastern beauty, but stripped away from its golden light, so it's just teetering on the edge of is this beautiful or is this terrible, and I think that helps convey something of the time and the place and the meaning in the image.

Do you think your work has any relationship to the traditional war artist?

Inevitably before you go on one of these things you look at all those war artist commissions and have a look at things that people did in other war zones and they were helpful and not helpful because I think you are not building your work on the basis of other people's journeys. You have to base it on the base of your own personal journeys and in fact that's what I did but the work does refer to history, it does refer to historical mediation of the desert, but by photography. So you know I have photographs of the desert by Sébah, by other different people, I began to look at all of that, I looked at Robertson, Fenton, and people who had historically looked at

conflict in those far-flung destinations but I did look at Nash I did look at, I mean I looked at all of it of course, you know Kitson, everybody. I think as an artist you have to have knowledge of what's gone on before but I don't think you set yourself among them and think how am I going to sit or fit amongst all those other people, I don't think that's relevant or important. I think what's more important is how the work sets within your overall body of practice and it makes some sense because commissions are tricky things. If you build your career on commissions you end up with this eclectic bizarre practice and I think, that doesn't reflect your interests or make any sense as a whole.

This commission was a great fit, I think Angela Weight at that time saw that what I had done in Northern Ireland could bring something very different to this commission and therefore made a case for it. I guess and I think it was right, I think I have probably made some of my best work there and it really has changed a lot of the work since. So how it sits within that context is more interesting for me than how it sits more broadly.

How do you feel about the label war artist?

Well one of the big debates in 2001, when the commissions were awarded, was that label of war artist, because up until that point that's the term that people used, and god people still use that term even now in relation to those commissions and of course *official war artist* was even the term before that. I think myself and Langlands & Bell would all

have run a mile if it had been called Official War Artist and that was a big discussion at that time, so changing them to the *Imperial War Museum Artist Commissions* was a, I think a sensible thing given the context of the time I think nobody wants to be involved in anything official, I think, nor does anybody want to be labelled a war artist.

Now you can only control so much of that yourself because the media even at that time still announced them as that, and so on and they still do, I think that in a way is inevitable, but you want to be known as an artist not any kind of an artist. I think that would be bizarre.

How you feel your work fits in to a tradition of landscape photography and war photography?

People often ask me about that photograph that's a reference to Roger Fenton and was it deliberate and did I recognise that at the time and so on. And very much so, and that would have been a photograph that I would have known and had been a slide, ironically, in my talks about my work even before then, the idea of absence in conflict and the kind of militarised space or this highly charged space in the aftermath. So we were in northern Afghanistan I think, in Kunduz and we were heading to a minefield in a truck and we just rounded this corner and I looked to my right, maybe at the end of the day, maybe coming back from the minefield, and I saw this valley, stretch of valley and ordnance lying in it, and immediately I saw it and said 'you must stop the car!', so we stopped and I got out.

Now this place was effectively, it's where the Taliban had hidden loads of weaponry so there are other images, if you were to see the full contact sheet you'd see that there's other big channels with piles and piles of unexploded Russian rockets. And what they had done was they had buried them in these big tunnels so they could dig them up and use them and they'd been found and they were being ready to be exploded. So, I made that photograph and I remember going back that night to the camp and I was making a radio programme, which is also in the archive of the museum, all of those radio recordings, and I say that night, I made a homage to the Fenton picture today. I mean I was standing making that and I thought wow you know that's uncanny really that everything in a sense physically was the same, round cannonballs were long rockets, but physically they were the same and it did make me think that actually the nature of war in all that time, hasn't really changed. It's still about death, you know and about place and about some far flung place in the middle of nowhere where people live and die. It was a real moment for me, because of course it collapsed together not just photographic history, the whole idea of conflict being this continuum, a very depressing moment.

What were your thoughts when you made Sectarian Murder?*

In 19 ..., well in the mid 1980s I was an art student here in England and Paul Graham the photographer at that time was making his *Troubled Land* work

in Northern Ireland, and so it was a, almost like a eureka moment for me. I mean he showed us those photographs as he was working on them, as students, and I remember partially thinking at the time, (sigh) another Englishman coming over in his Golf GTI on the Larne-Stranraer ferry and making photographs of Northern Ireland and going back again and was very annoyed by it. But of course as time went on in those months and Paul was teaching me he said to me you know you should be making work there, you should be, and I hadn't been, I hadn't been making work about the situation at all and then in a project that he ran we all made autobiographic highly subjective pieces of work and I made a piece, a diary piece of work from a diary I had kept when I was 15 years old. I took the diary entries and went back to those sites to make photographs, you know and growing up in North Belfast that diary was peppered full of you know very mundane everyday things about going to the cinema to see an X rated movie, horror movie, as a 15 year old and in the same diary entry mixed in with someone up the street being shot dead or the hunger strikers, or whatever. So this political narrative mixed in with the mundane and everyday and I read the diary first of all and thought there's nothing interesting in it, and Paul Graham looked at it and said look at that, look at that, and showed me this and I think that moment of thinking, the idea of making some work about the situation from within, that I could actually do something that could be meaningful and one of the frustrations about being Northern Irish and finding

yourself in Surrey, surrounded by quite often middle class English people, was that one you realised the place you were from was not an ordinary place, because of course living there all your life that's all you knew.

I never knew anything any different than being searched going into shops, you know, all of the kind of normal things about that conflict, and everyone I spoke to would say to me, ah but sure everyone who is killed in Northern Ireland is either a policeman or a soldier or a terrorist - very much not the case, two thirds of the people killed in Northern Ireland were innocent civilians killed for their perceived religion. And I got hold of a book by Martin Dillon and Dennis Lahene, again I hadn't even read many political texts, I studied politics at A Level at school but hadn't really read politically about Northern Ireland because you didn't, you didn't even talk about the political situation if you grew up there. So this book was called *Political murder in Northern Ireland* and was an exposé written in 1975 about sectarian murder, because it was being suppressed even as a concept then, and that got me interested and I started doing some research, went back to Belfast, started trawling through newspaper archives, no internet of course so physically, day by day. I did, I think I went for six weeks, and six weeks it took me to go through three years of newspapers and just take out the extracts of sectarian murders. And I started with North Belfast, just where I had grown up, and I went back to these places same way as I had with

my little diary project, with the texts and made photographs where the people had been murdered.

Started off actually the first picture some local shops beside where we had lived, five boys outside the chip shop were shot down by a machine gun fire. Something I had experienced as a boy, thankfully no one got hurt on that occasion. So I started piecing these together and then it just kind of grew from there and then for a year I made more and more of these around Belfast. And I have removed any reference to the religion because the papers would have said today a Protestant man was killed or Catholic man was tied to a chair with barbed wire before being shot through the head so removed that. And yet the first time it was exhibited in Belfast, which wasn't for almost ten years, it was exhibited in something like fifteen countries before it was shown in Belfast, you could understand why, but the first thing said to me by a journalist back then was, how many of these are Protestant, how many are Catholic? I mean that mentality of score counting, but that piece of work was about very much about the banality of place and that these places only become charged and only become interesting when you know what happens there, so you have this text and a fairly banal picture, and it's the space between the text and image that unlocks the narrative and obviously that's where the viewer then imagines the violence. For the violence to be imagined is very important because to go back to that idea of the media, you know, no amount of media images of violence will ever tell

that story because you can never truly appreciate or understand that and I think Hollywood done us a disservice, we're just used to looking at that stuff and we don't know what's real and what's not real. I think it's the otherness of it is too distant for us to really empathise in a meaningful way, but actually in your own head it's much easier to project the violence. So when you read about a fourteen year old boy who is taken off the streets because he's wearing a Catholic school uniform, dragged into a car and taken into this gorgeous beauty spot and then shot through the back of the head, I mean, just brutal. And it's the incongruous nature of that place, which only a day later people would be walking their dogs, and that narrative is really the narrative of the Troubles.

KENNARDPHILLIPPS

Could you tell me a little bit about your artistic practice?

PETER KENNARD

Well we started working together before the invasion of Iraq and that's why we got together, 'cause we'd been on the big demonstration against the war and then we wanted to express what we were feeling after it, after the thing happened, so we started working, making work at that point.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yes it was really, it was like the frustration of being a citizen, being disempowered by government policy, even after walking with a million people, and it having no influence whatever on government policy. That massive frustration and anger really, so a lot of our work, I mean that's a starting point for. I suppose that is the inspiration for nearly everything that we make, is the starting point of anger and frustration at policy that's beyond our control as citizens, so I sort of identify myself very much as a citizen, you know as an artist it's like an extension of just being an everyday citizen.

PETER KENNARD

And also I started getting into art at the time of the Vietnam war and through the ant-Vietnam demonstration at that time there was a whole movement built up against the Vietnam war so it wasn't just a demo and then nothing. Whereas with Iraq there was that feeling that you could go on this demo, there were other demos but there wasn't really a big movement building up of organizations. So for us to make work was a way

for us to continue expressing what we were feeling.

Is that how you started working with Stop The War Coalition? Were you working together on that?

PETER KENNARD

Well we made the work independently really and then we contacted *Stop The War Coalition* and they started using the images and we did talks about our work at meetings and became part of it in that way.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yes that's quite common, we've built up a body of work that is very useful to lots of different organisations in their different campaigning or events or exhibitions, that they're running. So people often come to us looking for material that they can include in a campaign, not commissioning us, not asking us to make something specific but all of our work is freely viewable on the internet so a lot of people pick up and find 'oh that would fit in with this campaign' which is pretty much what happened with *Stop The War* as well.

And how does working together change your work, if it does?

PETER KENNARD

Well I was working more as a studio based artist before I started working with Cat, I made more campaigning work and then became more studio-based. Working with Cat sort of got me out of the studio, got me back in the world. Through her sort of inspiration and energy, that got me thinking that there are ways. I got disillusioned in

a sense with working as a sort of public artist, in the 90s especially everything was about the idea of money, young YBAs, that whole feeling that art was sort of commodity, so I'd sort of gone back into just working on my own. But working with Cat, you know, we found, directly found ways to start working together and getting the work out and our ideas seemed to match in terms of what we felt about Iraq.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yeah and what we wanted to make work about. But also it brought the whole digital technology as well because you were painting when we first met and I think maybe the digital technology reopens possibilities for making graphic work again in a way that wasn't... I brought the equipment and technology the scanners and the computers and the printers, but then he sort of exploded this taboo of having any dirt around that technology... for the first time I was throwing dust and blood and oil and spit and dirt on to the scanner which is like a real, normally big taboo to put any kind of dirt near it, but it was in a dirty paint studio so that was quite normal for you. So that was very liberating for me, so it transformed the possibilities of making with digital technology for me.

And what kind of work were you doing before?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Well I was working, I did a lot of work in the commercial sectors around photography, so I was I suppose I was very... I mean if I'm honest a lot of the influence from me comes from fashion and advertising and all the commercial side of

photography that ... I would have been in my late 20s when we met and out of college for maybe three or four years, working in London in all the different commercial industries of photography. And I had a very great urge to see, try and develop some kind of work that would allow more serious social content to go into the realms of fashion. Not necessarily advertising but the graphic sort of language and power of advertising definitely is an influence on me. So I think when I am making work I am always using that as my kind of, what's it called, my benchmark, my sort of level. Is it as powerful, can it match up against that, because I feel as a public we are very much dominated by the language of advertising and commercial, visual imaging. And that's kind of, that is, that's the landscape that an artwork that wants to discuss something on a social level has to compete with, that's how I see what I'm making, it wants to compete evenly on that public level. I suppose because I want the audience to be the public at large as opposed to a smaller group of art, within a smaller art scene. It's very much for the public that I want to make work so then it has to match up and be able to, I suppose it has to be able to communicate as directly and as fast and sort of strongly but then hopefully without that kind of propagation of the commercial side of visual imagery which is always trying to sell you something and always trying to push an idea.

Were you intentionally almost trying to create a brand? I mean not in a negative way but, a very clear, sort of visual identity?

BOTH

No.

PETER KENNARD

No I don't think we were, it wasn't intentional it was just coalescing of us two working together that created it I think.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I think the only thing that identifies us in our work is actually, I mean, visually if you look at some of our work, I think, the subject matter and the fact that it's always on a heavy sort of, a heavy critique of any kind of Government policy or corporate policy, the two things are pretty much the same now.

Can you talk a little bit about the use of collage in your work, digital and analogue? I'm interested in how you find your materials?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

We do actively look for material and, and we've built up a huge archive that we use regularly. Over the years it's built up and up and it's predominantly press photography that we use but sometimes photography by friends, who are photographers, who are professional photographers but not necessarily working directly for the press.

PETER KENNARD

And we take some as well, we take some images. I mean some of it comes, it's like stimulated by pictures you found and then some of it, one of us has got an idea and is looking for pictures. I think it's a mixture of both those ways of working. And also when you're looking through tons of pictures, you do start thinking visually, so you start adding pictures together, I mean I always tell students

people you can't do it in your head you have to do it with images and start thinking that way.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

'Cause, yeah, I'm very convinced that it's a different part of the brain that's working visually or responding or so it's not such literal thinking. So like you say it's quite often thrown up by sifting through many images. I mean you might have a subject in mind that you want to focus on but it's the images themselves that throw up the suggestion of a connection, that then works.

And how do you see your role as artists in relation to war and conflict?

PETER KENNARD

Well I mean, I suppose I've always made work that's totally against war and compares war, the spending on war, financial spending on war to poverty in the world and starvation, you know bringing those, montage can bring all that together and, I mean I think it's like art is a place where you can make anti-war statements and I think they're pretty vital to make, it's hopefully what we've been doing.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yeah and I, like I was saying, I align myself with a citizen as an artist so, I mean I can't think of citizens, I mean people in general, no one wants to get into a war, no one wants to be stuck in a conflict zone, but life has to go on once, even once that war has started. So I align myself very much with that human reality, which is always anti the attack, aggression, or, or militarised response, just wants to continue every day human relations and existence.

PETER KENNARD

And also like with Iraq there was only one newspaper was against the war, *The Times* maybe *The Independent*. So where were the voices, they weren't on the BBC, they weren't on telly, so what do you do as an artist? You respond or do you think oh well I will go into my studio and paint flowers or something, so I mean it is that thing of actually it's an important role for the artist to take I think, not that every artist should do it but if one's got the sort of abilities and the passion to do it then it's important to make those sorts of images even if they get out to a very small proportion of the world because of one's working in a very small sort of economic area.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

But if they exist, if you have made the visual imagery then they always exist, so there is always the potential for them to go out to a wide audience.

PETER KENNARD

Especially on the internet.

What do you feel you contribute to our understanding of conflict as artists?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Well, we can counter the mainstream press representation of war and conflict with a human voice, or a human image, an image of the human reality of conflict which I think the press deeply ignores because I think it does follow a sort of propaganda line.

PETER KENNARD

And also, I don't think of art as changing the world but art can align with people that want to, you know

like I said *Stop The War*, so there is a whole group of people and they are mainly, especially in England which is a very literary culture, they are mainly concerned with words. So it's very important for artists to sort of give a visual image, like hopefully our stuff has for the *Stop The War*, and someone like David Gentleman's work obviously has had a big impact in terms of *Stop The War*. So that's really important because those sorts of things get through, especially to young people, imagery is what gets through, you know, a 13-year-old is not going to sit down and read Chomsky! But they will see one of our images and maybe think about what's going on and you wouldn't get that, like Cat says, from the press.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yeah I think the problem with the press at the moment is that you may see an image of human suffering frequently in the press but it's so chopped together with advertising and editorial that's not relevant to that image, that the kind of intellectual impression that you get from coming across images of human suffering in the press is very, it's very throwaway. You have an emotional response to it but then there's no critique there and I think the press perhaps would say nowadays it's not their place to critique, they are just reporting, but actually I don't think it's always been like that. I think there was very critical press some decades ago and everything's been toned down but I think online, on the internet you find much more critical independent press, nowadays.

Can you explain how Blairaq came about?

PETER KENNARD

Blairaq was an exhibition in 2007 that we made in London and the majority of it was very large pieces of work, large-scale pieces that were made, we made them out of newspaper, was the backing sort of base canvas for them, and on top there would be primarily a photomontage but hugely scaled up so maybe 7 m x 3 m. And they were all based around the destruction of civil society in Iraq and *Blairaq* was the title because it was, for the UK, it was Blair's instigation that destruction and dismantling and anarchic chaos of Iraq was created by him and his decisions. And there were two or three images of Blair in that exhibition where we have taken a portrait Blair and printed it across many newspapers, but then ripped through the top layer of newspaper to reveal images, different images from Iraq and from scenes of destruction in Iraq, so his face is basically eaten into and destroyed and disfigured by the chaos in Iraq. And similarly with George Bush we did something similar and there is another one of Blair which mixes together images from Iraq but also images of policing and surveillance in the UK. We were trying to make the connection between the laws based around the concept of the War On Terror which Blair and Bush were pioneers of and the huge increase in surveillance and policing powers that were brought about by this concept of the War On Terror, and I think in America it might be called Homeland Security.

And was Photo-Op part of it?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Photo-op was, yes, we made a light box of photographs for that exhibition and ...

PETER KENNARD

And embedded it in concrete I think in the middle of the room, didn't I?

A pile of rubble, to make it, to give it... so the whole show was sort of like an installation, you were surrounded by all these images that were coming at you, made in different ways. 'Cause some of them were like prints and some of them are very physical things with holes in with tears which aren't covered up, you can see all the making really, so again that's another way to get people involved in the subject matter.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yeah we were very concerned about starting to make a rougher surface on these montages, and to try and engage with materials in a rougher way. It was somehow, would be more in tune with the subject matter of a destroyed landscape or a city that's under attack and being bombed, broken down.

Is that where the dust and concrete on the scanner came from?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Actually that came in at the beginning, the scanner work was all making fine art prints but the end result of a fine art print is very bejewelled inside a glass framed frame, oak framed glass-fronted frame. And I had an issue with that being so rarefied in comparison with what we were engaging with when we were making the work, the process was very dirty but the actual finished result wasn't, also the inexpensive factor of using newspaper allowed us to work very large and very rough

and very immediate, so we were bashing them, bashing these surfaces with hammers and wetting the images that we had printed on thin paper or newsprint. If you smash them up they literally explode so we were able to make montages that had a kind of physical 3D reality to them.

And violence?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yeah, whereas working with small scale or purely digital, working less engaged with the material, it's much more controlled, you don't get a sense of physicality I suppose which in the end conflict is all about. I mean that's what the reality of conflict is, or the human side of conflict, it's all about physical endurance, or challenge, or suffering, or attack, and I think that was very ... that was what we were pushing towards when we were making these larger works with less expensive materials. It allowed us to explore the physical side of it more.

Can you talk a little bit about how Photo-Op came about?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yeah well, I mean in terms of thinking about *Photo-Op* before it was made there wasn't any thought, in that kind of a literal sense conscious thought. We were making a series of posters in 2005, anti-war posters, and so at that time we were looking through on the computer screen thousands of images from Iraq and also images from the UK, so images that would involve Blair or maybe some images of George Bush, soldiers, maybe, based

around bases in the UK but thousands of images all the time and eventually your visual part of your brain wherever that is, it takes over at some point and it starts making its own connections and its own sense of this mass of images. So *Photo-Op* came up like that, it wasn't a thought out thing. I mean there was a definite intent to try and heavily, heavily critique the government's policy to go into Iraq and to continue to occupy, and Tony Blair obviously being the figurehead but it was the images itself. So the image of Tony Blair is a PR, it's a PR *Labour, New Labour* press relations set-up shot for his 2005 election campaign, so he's standing there photographing himself and in the original behind him there's cadets, Navy cadets I think and their siblings, so a whole bunch of children, some in uniform some not. And obviously by then we had looked through thousands of images of the destruction in Iraq so that portrait of him, what's so ... do you want to say something about it?

PETER KENNARD

I mean, you know it's one of those ones where it's just, it's, that thing of bringing two images together and then, which is the sort of classic idea of montage in that sense, bringing two images together and it's an image of Blair which you never actually see. You see him, if he goes to Iraq heavily guarded with soldiers all smiling around him, and that's what you see so that one brings those things, two things together very clearly. And I think it's to do with, it's quite difficult with colour montage to make it look, to make it have a realism about it but that seems to do it because of the lighting on him and the lighting of the explosion behind him, so in fact some people do think it's real you know,

which is interesting in what they think Blair would photograph.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I think also people think it's real because he is so unapologetic, and he's so still self convinced and publicly self convinced by his decision. And the way he says that is in such a straightforward way... I can't remember what he says but he says I didn't make a mistake or I thought I was right and that's enough, sort of thing. It says basically that he is happy about his decision.

PETER KENNARD

And I think it gives people the room to think it's not like a cartoon which is distorting someone so that what you think about them, this is just two simple pictures but it's that juxtaposition that allows people to look at it and think of their own feelings about Blair. I mean it's got some openness about it I think, maybe it's quite understated in a way and that's why I think it works, so it has been used not just about Iraq, the *British Medical Journal* uses it to talk about the cuts in the NHS and things like that so it has got a sort of generic thing and hopefully will become one of the images he is remembered by.

I did an interview with the British Legion magazine and they were quite keen to put that picture on the cover...

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

The British Council have used it in an exhibition in Delhi which I was very surprised by.

PETER KENNARD

But the British Legion put it in the same month that he said he was going to give the money from his

book to the British Legion, it was quite a strange juxtaposition there.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

No after, straight afterwards...What is so satisfying is the original picture of him obviously was how he wanted to be, how he wanted to project himself, which is satisfying to subvert it completely.

Why do you think it has become so iconic?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I think also it has apparently gone viral online and I think globally it's just it makes such a clear statement. I mean yes it's of Tony Blair and I think it exactly describes him and his foreign policy but I think it also echoes so many heads of state around the world and their attitude to making a decision to go to war or attack or create some violent situation, but I think it resonates very well for just the sort of human population. I think that is why it's become so ... just seems to sync that whole problem of state leadership and its disregard for human equality and sort of equilibrium.

PETER KENNARD

I mean it sort of pins down his horrendous arrogance and non caring as well because there he is photographing an explosion with that manic smile, so it sort of says something about how he is in the world I think. There's a thing about having a mobile like that, so a lot of people, when it was in a shop in Oxford Street in a Banksy ghetto a lot of people photographed themselves, got other people to photograph themselves with a mobile looking at him with a mobile, it's got quite a sort of mimetic element to it as well.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I guess a lot of people identify with that as well, the thing of photographing yourself with your friend beside you or something.

My next question is a bit broader: what's the power of images? Can they instigate change?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I think images they really pull up a response in oneself, I mean I think images operate in a different part of the brain than when we're speaking or writing or listening and in the same way that music... I think uses a different part of the brain. So, yes I think they can instigate change and I think that they work on a deeper level, our visual recognition obviously not forgetting that a lot of people don't have a visual literacy like we do here but, yeah I do, I think very much, visual is so much part of our landscape now, our urban landscape and technological landscape.

PETER KENNARD

I don't really think that in themselves they create change. You know, people looking at images and say anti-war images they might act on it in some way, they might do something so in that way it's possible. I mean not in themselves do they create change but just the facts of creating critical thinking.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

But do you think that advertising would use imagery so much if it didn't have some sort of power over people?

PETER KENNARD

Yes you can measure how many baked bean cans

you sell if you do a series of baked bean ads can't you, so you know what you are aiming for when you do it. But our stuff doesn't, it's not propaganda, our stuff, it's not telling anyone to do anything, it's just getting people to think.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yes but I'm not saying that you can say what change has occurred but I do think that visual imagery it has a power definitely and therefore it can, it can effect change. But not that you could control it in the same way you could with advertising, or if you have a product or if you haven't an aim or propaganda, but I think imagery it definitely has a power that people are responding to.

PETER KENNARD

I mean, allied to anti-war movements and things like that it can have a power because it's a way of giving voice to that movement, but I don't know ...

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Your question was about imagery, it wasn't about art?

Images yes that's right.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I think they do and I think probably if you look back through journalistic history I'm sure there's been some images that were very key.

PETER KENNARD

Well, in Vietnam...

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Public opinion one way or another about specific situations.

PETER KENNARD

The image of the little napalm girl in Vietnam, that had a massive effect which is why they try and stop photographers going off to wars now.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I mean a lot of that, yes, yes.

What is the balance between artistic value and political value in your work? What makes good political art?

PETER KENNARD

Well I mean I think, people think, if you make war images about politics, you don't have to worry so much about the aesthetics, that's the sort of general ... which is crap really because I mean you have to make work as best you can in the same way that if you're painting apples, you know you try and make work that's as strong as you can make it, so the aesthetics is as vital as the subject matter. The subject matter obviously one sees a lot of, and we get sent stuff by people, as art it doesn't really work. So the art and the content are completely wedded I think aren't they?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yeah and I think if the art was given more consideration and more priority and you probably wouldn't end up with a very successful bit of political art. I think, it doesn't mean that the politics have to be so obvious that it's a politician in the work. But if the politics aren't completely embedded in the work, ... I'm not talking about party politics I'm just talking about sort of political motivation which could, you could call it social motivation as much as I mean my take on politics is very much something about social reality and social ... what's

the word? What's the word for concerns about society and social living? It's not just party politics; I'm not actually as much of the party political person as Peter is. I think I'm just a different generation; I was brought up during Thatcher's reign and it's just sort of witnessing sort of disempowered ... what's the word? There was no powerful left when I was coming of age as a young adult, I think, so I don't really see a place for social empowerment.

How do you want your work to be shown? You don't seem precious about this and are willing to use images in a variety of contexts, in the gallery, in a fine art context, in disposable formats and on the street, protests etc

PETER KENNARD

I think that's really important with our work, that it does get out, you know, that it should be in galleries and it should also be seen outside the gallery in every different context possible, you know, from T-shirts to whatever ... posters, so it's just a matter of not seeing any gradations between those things. I think galleries, we both think it's great to do gallery work, and we have just shown stuff in a show about war in the Herbert Gallery in Coventry, which is a great show, so that's really good to show in that. But then you've got to get out to people who don't go to galleries as well, and people who are concerned with more activist elements, so then you have to make work for that. I find it quite a conflict in a sense because the work that we do in galleries is very big, it's certainly got a quality that the more straight montage doesn't have, but it would only work inside a gallery.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Well, but then we have found ways to make a reproduction, of a work that in its original form can only show in a gallery because it's not strong enough to withhold standing in the street, or we have made a reproduction of it that has then gone up as a billboard in the street. So aesthetically it does work in both venues, it has an ability to hold in the slow space, more meditative space of a gallery but it also has, I'm talking about *Soldier 1* - it has a direct enough, fast enough graphic in it that can be read equally in the street, you know the culture is obviously a much faster environment.

PETER KENNARD

But its different from say *Photo-Op* which is made digitally, so, that's the form of it whereas that *Soldier 1* when it's on the hoarding it's still a reproduction of the original. It's a different ...

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Yeah but again I would say that *Photo-Op* can hold itself equally, it's made for a poster originally so yes its original form works as a reproducible thing so in magazines, newspapers, posters, bus side hoardings. But I think it also works equally well in a gallery because I think it just works so well that there's enough meditative, there's enough space in the image for the viewer to ponder, look at it slowly.

I'm interested in how you re-use iconography in your work and re-appropriate imagery in different contexts to create new work. Can you talk a bit about this?

PETER KENNARD

Well, we've got a sort of digital file of images on

different subjects, so one collects pictures and builds up a library of images and they are like quotes in a way, but they are quotes from the actual world. So say a writer picks up verbal quotes and puts them down so in that same way it's like a notebook but with images. They are from photographers who have been out actually photographing the world, so it's like bits of the world that you've got and then you play with it, you put them together in different ways.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

And also the same old bad stuff keeps happening. It's not like in the 60s, there hasn't been great progression away from sources of conflict and responses, military response is the same so it does lend itself to images being used and reused at different times in history and different geographical locations.

PETER KENNARD

It's also like, like the one of that *Soldier 1*, the soldier kicking a door in, we've used it in workshops with people because it's a sort of generic image of the everyday life being invaded by the military, you know your life being destroyed by someone kicking your door so we have used it. We did it in Holland and there was this group of, I think they were sort of retired, working women and they cut it out, put it very big in the street and then they set it up a whole room behind it with an ironing board and a table with flowers on and sat there and that was their installation, so it was like you know taking that image and then actually relating to it in different ways. And I think some of the images we have done you can relate ... I mean they're not just Iraq as well, they relate beyond that to the sort of horrors of war

in general, and I suppose when we look at stuff we go back to other artists, like go back to ... Goya is the greatest expression of the horrors of war and you know his stuff is still totally relevant.

Do you think of your work as having any relationship to a traditional war artist?

PETER KENNARD

I was quite influenced originally by Graham Sutherland's, those images of the buildings he did after the Second World War, and, that sort of way of actually looking in detail. It's one thing about I suppose British war artists tend to look at the detail, it's a graphic sort of sensibility, and that led on for me to use, 'cause I painted originally, and that led on to me to start using photographs of what was going on in the world and war but it came from looking at people.

And like Henry Moore's shelter drawings which I think are amazing you know, so they're got that sort of graphic intensity, so yeah.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I don't think I am influenced by traditional war artists because I don't think I ... I feel I suppose that their work tends to be more in line with kind of establishment thinking... I mean I know I was quite impressed by James Boswell's drawings, but I don't know if he's, I mean I think he was just an artist who was a soldier who did some drawings at war made some sketchbooks.

PETER KENNARD

He went to Iraq.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

They have a very sort of painful, there's a sort of very critical pain in there. I don't necessarily know what it's about but I can feel the objection coming off the lines in the drawings, whereas I don't feel, I don't get that sense of painful rejection of a situation from traditional war artists, it seems very relaxed to look at... I was very inspired by Steve McQueen's, that was an official war artist posting, his stamp project.

They are no longer called Official War Artists, they are IWM Artists... because it doesn't seem appropriate to describe them as Official War Artists...

PETER KENNARD

I always call myself an unofficial war artist, so that's one way of coping with it.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

Well that must be placing yourself in opposition to ...

PETER KENNARD

To the war artists? Well yeah, it's not really in opposition because I mean people like John Keane was making very strong images, got into a bit of trouble didn't he? I mean as long as they get into a bit of trouble there's something going on when you send a war artist, and then Linda Kitson got into trouble from the other direction for not showing the army as this sort of... But I mean it's a difficult subject to make art about.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

What?

PETER KENNARD

To suddenly get someone to make war art, who isn't

doing that, I think it's more about now people who are engaged with that sort of way of working.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I don't know I think the most interesting work about war is made by artists who ... they are driven by, something happens and they just have to turn to that subject in response and that's very much I think comes from a human perspective. Whereas I suppose I think the Official War Artist perhaps, because they are being sent on a commission and I don't know who they speak to but maybe they travel with the British army, and it perhaps gets ... the actual inspiration for the work they are making unavoidably perhaps gets shifted towards the military side of things as opposed to the human side, just because it gets buried underneath the whole commission process itself.

PETER KENNARD

Could you talk a little bit about how @earth came about?

PETER KENNARD

It actually came about because I went to the London Book Fair on the year when there when the volcano erupted, and so no one managed to get to the London Book Fair, so all these publishers were very happy to, even to talk to someone like me who was going around! So I met the guys from the Tate, everyone was desperate to meet someone to talk to, anyway they liked the idea of doing... they hadn't actually done an artist's book, they had done lots of catalogues so they said do a sort of brief, 30 pages then come back, so I did that and they said get on with it. My thing to them was that I wanted it to come in under a tenner. That was really important so that it was very accessible and a lot of the images in it are going back, say some of them 40 years and there are new ones in it that were done with a young artist called Tarek Salhany, who worked on some of the new ones but when you put them in a book they merge together. You can't actually tell which is new and which is old, in that sense.

It's quite broad in its scope; can you talk a little bit about the themes?

PETER KENNARD

Well, it's trying to make a visual essay and I suppose quite ... one of the most biggest influences on me was John Berger, right from when I was in my teens,

he always talked about the idea of the visual essay and he did a book called *The Seventh Man* which used text and image. So I've always wanted to try and make an essay out of montages, that you read from the beginning and there were seven [sections], there's one about the military, there's one about war and there's one about global warming, and poverty. Seven different subjects. The idea is that people read it like that, which I don't think people do. I mean I've done a few books and they've all failed in that sense. That's why I wanted to go onto the next one, that idea that you've to make a book that people could read as a narrative that didn't have any words, or had very few words but it's very difficult to do that, I think. And then the idea was to make it in hard covers, make it like a little pocket book and it's like a brick, you can throw it, it has force.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I was just going to say maybe it's good that people don't read it as a linear narrative because that's maybe just a, that's irrelevant, I mean there is no such thing as a linear narrative in the subjects that you are looking at...

PETER KENNARD

But there would be if it was in words or if it was a graphic novel, graphic novels

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

But maybe actually the subjects that you are tackling don't... they can't be explained in linear narratives, as much as we would like them to be, perhaps they are not explicable. Perhaps it has to be much more, whatever the opposite of linear narrative is.

PETER KENNARD

Yeah but then it's not, it doesn't, the point of it

being in a book is it is a narrative to me, otherwise it should be in a box, you know, like an experimental novel or something.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I don't know, I like the idea that you can open it at any page and then go from that page maybe 30 pages forwards and then 15 back and it all seems to connect, it all relates all the content of all the chapters somehow they have a connection with each other.

I've read it in a linear way...

PETER KENNARD

Have you done it? Yay! (laughs)

It's a dark narrative, and it gets darker...

PETER KENNARD

There is actually a point where it has an optimistic moment, not many people have noticed that, they just think it's all dark, but there is a red cross and then missiles start breaking up, and then hands start breaking barbed wire but it's not probably emphasised enough.

Do you see it as a culmination of all your projects?

PETER KENNARD

Well I always think each project when I'm working on it is a sort of culmination due to my great age, it could be the culmination. But no I suppose. I suppose the idea of bringing some of the early stuff in, to the present, to a new generation as well, because obviously a book like that, most people it

appeals to are hopefully young people, you know, who are incredibly visually aware because of the internet and, they can read images really fast. So it's great to bring those images to a new generation and to, you know get people to see the possibilities of making dissenting work, with images. Which is happening, you can see it on the internet.

And do you see it as having any particular audience?

PETER KENNARD

Well I go on about young people, some people are going to say stop going on about young people (laughs) but I do think it is especially for young people who are interested in making art, 16 year olds who are doing A-Level art or something, and then they can see that they can actually take on some of these things that they are thinking about, and you know they are thinking much more about, I think since Iraq really, I think young people are much more conscious politically, and obviously the effect on their life is so enormous now if you want to be a student or whatever, there is this feeling that they want to actually communicate, some of them want to communicate politically in their work, so I think it shows a way in and hopefully that is an audience and because it's only a tenner, it's a possibility.

And how does the book format change or shape the work?

PETER KENNARD

Well I still think the book format is a great way, you've just got this book in your pocket and, well, I come from that generation obviously pre-digital, so I think the thing about having a book that you can open at any place and, have that sort of physical relationship to it is still very different to the internet. So the book, I have always thought, is a really great medium and I'm always amazed that there isn't more experimentation in the more political book, in the way that Berger did in his early days. You get it in magazines like *Adbusters* and things but you don't really get books that are taking on subjects, other than through graphic novels now, people like Joe Sacco is amazing, but I think more artists and photographers should get involved in that.

And do you think images can provide something that words can't or is it just something different?

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

I do, I said that quite a few times I definitely think images provide something that words can't.

PETER KENNARD

It's instant isn't it, it's ...

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

You don't have quite the same level of control over how a viewer will digest it or interpret it, so it's more democratic perhaps or a more equal balance between author and audience.

PETER KENNARD

And that's why the idea of narrative is important because it's like putting... A montage is a series,

a series of sentences you put together into paragraphs, those paragraphs then read throughout it, if people do read it that way, that's the question. I mean some people do, you said you've read it so that's great if people do do that. But it's also a resource because all those images are then out in the world in different ways and there is no language so it's global. The only language is on the back that says @earth in 50 different languages so the idea was to create a global object that didn't need translating and obviously you can do that with images.

You put an index in which is interesting.

Yes. A visual index, I suppose that was symbolic, I don't expect anyone to go and say that the earth is on page 12 for instance, but it's a symbolic idea of saying this is a completely visual book, which you only usually get that with children's books... All the chapter headings are computer files so again there's no words in that. It was to find a way to do the whole thing without words, that was the task. And I worked with Tarek Salhany, who's a very young artist and he's very bright politically as well so there was that sort of relationship and he did all the Photoshop work on it, which is another thing that young people can do, in amazing ways.

CAT PICTON-PHILLIPPS

So you are including as young people, anyone below the age of 50

PETER KENNARD

Yeah (laughs) its true isn't it?

ANNABEL DOVER

Can tell me a little bit about your artistic practice?

Ok my artistic practice I guess, to explain it a little bit, when I was at University, I had a job working for an antiques dealer, and my job was to get all the rubbish, when we did house clearances, and get rid of it all. But in the end I ended up sort of keeping it because of the things that were not important to him, I thought were really kind of quite touching and sad, so people's objects and their pills, how their bedside table was laid out, and their cards and things, and I didn't really know what to do with it, I was sort of overwhelmed by it. And then when I did the MA at St. Martin's, I did a painting a day for a year and I did paintings of all the objects and all the things, and created a sort of cubicle, little room that's self lit and it had curtains, so people went in and when they came out they told me loads of stories about themselves related to the objects. And I really liked that, and that kind of was a big moment for me, I felt like, it was really great that these people were telling me their stories about these objects that weren't necessarily to do with them, but they really felt were to do with them.

Could you tell me a bit about the thinking behind the cyanotype series?

To explain a little bit about the cyanotype series. A cyanotype is, it's a very basic form of photograph, it's a sort of photogram. So you mix potassium ferricyanide and ammonium ferric citrate together to create a chemical reaction, then you paint it

onto paper at night, so it's sort of magical, slightly witchy and then you let it dry, and then you place an object, can be anything, on it, that's sort of fairly thin, expose it to the sun and then wash it off, with water, just tap water. So I like the real simplicity of it, but I also liked that it looked quite scientific, so it's the early form of a blueprint and it also looks a bit like an X-ray. It looks a bit like the sort of plan or prototype of these objects, I guess. I think I liked the idea of something that had a big emotional charge, these objects, so the sock for example. And trying to sort of scientifically analyse it to see if you could get to the root of the emotion, which I don't think you can (laughs) but, it's just, I suppose it's also the idea that science is revered, to me in my head, when I was growing up, science was revered, taken seriously and emotion wasn't, but to me I'm much more affected by things and their emotional strength, I guess than scientific analysis of it. Does that make sense?

Can you just describe how you chose your objects?

T/C 03.40 Well yes I mean, part of it is visual, some of them like the sock actually was too thick to do a cyanotype so I actually had to draw it, all the original again, each sort of fibre and things which probably took me quite a few months, and so that was really frustrating because I love the story of the sock. And all the other things, I guess the one common theme was the war and people's very different reactions to the war...

Could you tell each story behind the prints? The hat and the sock especially...

Of course so the sock story is, the sock belongs to my stepfather Ken who is in his 90s now, so he was born in Yarmouth which is on the north Norfolk coast, quite a poor family, his father was a fisherman and I guess I think that's probably what he would have been had the war not occurred. And so he signed up early as a lot of crazy boys did, I suppose because it's exciting and he thought wow I can get out of Yarmouth and this whole new life ...I suppose it sort of adds to the tragedy often, that people didn't even have to go to war and they chose to. He was a rear gunner and I think it was on his second mission he was shot down and landed on some nice soft fir trees, and an apparently really nice woman came out, - he was shot down in Germany - came and sort of helped him, gave him hot soup which he really didn't want, apparently, this boiling hot day and he wanted cool water. She was very nice to him, then the men of the village got to hear I think, and kicked him and he woke up in hospital. But the really sweet thing that the German nurses had done, I think that he is still touched by - he suffers from dementia, he doesn't know who I am, he doesn't know many of his family members - but he really loves this sock and keeps it for the story.

The German nurses had washed his sock, he woke up, he had no leg, his leg had been removed, and the sock that was on that leg had been sewn up, stitched up, just leaving the hole mark where I suppose the shrapnel or something had hit him.

I just thought it was such a sweet thing to do and I think he still thinks it's such a sweet thing to do that they almost wanted to mend his leg. It looks very much like a physical scar, the sewing, and that seemed quite kind of, in relief to the story about the British nurses, and he had to hide the sock from them because when he came out of the POW camp, all his other things were burnt by them and I think that really upset him. I suppose it was maybe for hygiene or just the idea of eradicating any trace of the prisoner-of-war camp. But he had a leg that was really beautifully made by the Russian POWs, out of cardboard, apparently just didn't get a leg nearly as good until the late 80s on the NHS. It was just amazing, sort of like cornets of cardboard. The Russians had made beautiful objects to swap for food. They had carved these amazing bears, little miniature bear figurines out of cherry pips, made beautiful things out of matchsticks, and these were these really precious things that he was really looking forward to showing his family, I think, and really being able to tell the story. It's part of his identity I guess, in the prisoner-of-war camp and I think he felt like that had been obliterated by the nurses really, who had burnt it all, so yes he hid the sock under the mattress and it got out with him (laughs).

And what about the hat?

The story of the hat is that it belonged to my grandmother, so it was special, it was a very nice hat anyway that came from Marshall & Snelgrove in Leicester, a sort of posh hat. But it was the hat that she was wearing when she got the telegram to say

that her husband was dead, been killed, presumed dead, missing in action. It was also kept with some other objects in this cabinet that she had, locked in the bottom drawer, and there were some other things in there, along with a stocking that she kept I guess in case he ever did come back, and when she died there was a picture in her wallet of him, and certainly not of her husband [at that time], don't think she liked him at all!

And was the negligee* in that?

Yes the negligee, the negligee and the stocking and some lipstick were all in the bottom drawer, I guess, kind of, for his return.

Could you tell the story of the scarf*?

Yes, so the silk scarf had belonged to my stepfather Ken, his father who was a fisherman in Yarmouth and he wore it especially when it was stormy. He would wear it when he went out on the fishing trawler to protect him from drowning, that was the idea. And a bit like the idea of the caul people are born with, a caul to stop you drowning. Quite a few fishermen apparently had these caul substitutes or bits of caul and so then he passed it onto his son which is quite sweet because he was still fishing- he was sacrificing his own luck I guess, for his young son to wear in the plane, and it has the shrapnel damage around the corners so you can just see it's a silk scarf where it's been damaged but its still, Ken still thinks it's a very lucky scarf because it saved him.

Can you talk a bit about your choice of medium, the cyanotype?

It's kind of got an interesting history, cyanotype, because it was discovered by John Herschel who was a scientist, astronomer, but then it was popularised and really used by Anna Atkins in the 1850s. She made these beautiful botanical albums which she then gave to big institutions like the V&A and The Royal Society, and they were seen, her things were kind of seen as botanical but when you look at them again they look quite creative and sort of personal and tell her own kind of personal stories, I guess. So yes, she was the first woman, first person ever to make a photographic book even before Fox Talbot.

So how does the significance of an object, change when you reproduce it through painting or drawing or as a cyanotype?

I think the significance of an object does change when you make a reproduction of it, either by a drawing or a painting or a cyanotype. I guess you are making it yours in some way and you are making it look maybe uniform, and maybe making it slightly more neutral, not sure. I think, once you have that maybe slightly more neutral idea or visual presentation, then it might be easier for people to superimpose their narrative on it. And also by doing a kind of series or putting it through that process, I think also it gives a look of something that's quite scientific in a way...

What do you think the role of storytelling is in your work?

Well I think, I like other people's stories and I think often people can express their emotions much more easily through telling stories. I think often emotions are quite difficult to communicate and often you don't really know exactly what you feel until you maybe tell a story. And I guess when you meet someone new you are telling them a story, in whatever form that is.

The images are quite a quiet way of telling dramatic stories, dramatic points in people's lives I just wondered if you could talk a little bit about that?

I think to go back again to when I did the house clearances and there were these very insignificant things, or would have looked very insignificant, ... sort of packets of aspirin or, you know, lists. And I suppose they were just sort of small, could be seen as trivial domestic ephemera, and yet they could be parts in a huge human drama, that people may never know what that drama is. And I guess also that relates to why I want to paint or make cyanotypes of the objects and how that changes their meaning, once things become part of a collection they can sometimes regain their significance, I guess.

What do the individual memories and associations tell us about shared memory and the way we think about history?

Well I guess when you go to a museum, especially when I was young I used to think that it was for the truth or for the answer. And of course it's not that, necessarily, and especially for something like war, which is such a vast sort of incomprehensible subject sometimes, the only way of really being able to have or find a way into it, or understand aspects of it, is by looking at the very small stories of the individual. And I guess most people know somebody who has experienced war or has experienced the ripples of war in some way. I suppose everybody has memories of the war in some way, or has been told a story about the war, even if they are quite young.

You've talked about exchange of objects or objects changing hands being important for this series, was giving them to IWM also an important part of the work? What did it bring to the work?

Yes, so donating the cyanotypes to the Imperial War Museum was significant, because in the way that Anna Atkins the Victorian photographer donated her quite personal creations, her cyanotype albums to big institutions or British institutions, often extremely male at the time, like the Royal Society, the V&A, The British Library, The British Museum. By doing that she sort of entered into something, a big institution entered her very small kind of female voice and her small female story. She would never have been allowed in those institutions, she couldn't have been a member of the Royal Society and so it's a sort of way of creeping in, getting her voice in. So I liked it for that idea. I also liked it because of the idea, like with relics, relics weren't allowed to

be bought or sold (they were bought and sold, but it was a secret) so they had to be given or stolen. So I like that idea that something so special - not that I'm saying my work is so special - but I like the idea of the aura of an object or this reliquary, of something has to be given, it gives a sort of religious connotation to the work, I guess.

All the objects and stories in this series of cyanotypes are related to war, was this important to you?

Well I guess I'm very interested in, I think you mentioned turning points, I'm very interested in significant moments in a person's life, and so I'm interested in war in that way, because obviously it acts as a huge catalyst to lots of people. I mean Ken, for example, might have lived quite a quiet life, may never have travelled abroad, might have just been a fisherman for his whole life. And I think these sort of significant moments in people's lives are, I guess are by-products or caused by war, so that why I'm interested in them I guess, the emotional charge behind an object.

How do you see your role as an artist in relation to war and conflict?

I suppose actually quite a lot of my work is about conflict, but more personal probably, so family conflict. It is storytelling but not a perfect story, not something that has a beginning, a middle and a lovely conclusion. Often things that are unresolved and sort of disjunctures in life, things that don't quite go right, so in that way it is about

small conflicts. But yes, in these objects that are related to war it's about those small conflicts and the greater conflicts, the breaks in people lives. With my grandmother obviously, the person she really loved being killed and her desperately hoping they would come back and then my stepfather obviously his whole life changed, he lost his leg and how that affected him further on, he could never go back to being a fisherman. So yes, I guess conflict and personal dramas, maybe more than the ... I can't think of the big, I don't think I'm a big enough artist to think of the big things, big and macho!

How do you want viewers to engage with your work? Does it matter if they don't know the story of the objects?

Well I suppose I would like viewers to engage in the work in any way they want to, or maybe, they may not. I guess things like socks are pretty recognisable and something you can relate to yourself and just visually you can see that it looks like a sort of scar or something's happened to it, so that image is quite easy to read. I don't suppose I mind if people don't know the original story, as long as they feel able to communicate their own story or for it to incite another story.

Do you see this work as war art? Do you think of your work as having any relationship to the traditional war artist, are you influenced by any of these works?

I guess for me the idea of war artists are men, and are quite heroic and really in the action, and none

of those things are true of me, I might be heroic in a small way but not in that sort of gung ho physical way. But I think a lot of artists in the past have made amazing work, sometimes the most interesting work when they do it in relation to war. So I love Henry Moore's drawings and ink and wax drawings of the people in the Underground, for example. And they touch me a lot more than his other work, and the same for Nash and other people. I mean someone like Don McCullin whose whole life, he is in trauma because of all the things that he has seen, so it's very different from me. I guess I like the idea of emotions and the impact different things have on people's lives, and they can come in a lot of different ways.

LANGLANDS & BELL

Why did you decide to accept the commission?

NIKKI BELL

Because it was a sort of leap into the unknown, it was a highly unusual thing to do, to go to Afghanistan, we wouldn't have had the opportunity otherwise and we were very very curious about the situation there and wanted to find out...

BEN LANGLANDS

We had been exploring aviation systems, geostrategic issues in our work for some time and I think this commission suddenly came completely out of the blue, the possibility of doing it, but to us it seemed like an opportunity to test some of our ideas in the real world. That's why we took it up and as an artist, you want, you need new challenges and it seemed to us like a real challenge.

What were your first impressions of Afghanistan?

BEN LANGLANDS

We were horrified! Yeah, our first impressions of Afghanistan was that we were really horrified. I mean it was very shocking when we first arrived and at first we were so taken aback that we just thought what are we doing here and how can we make work, how can we even think about that, in this environment. But that sort of phase lasted for about 24/36 hours, then we started to look around and we began to notice things and

NIKKI BELL

I think the first thing that we noticed was the huge number of NGOs that were in Kabul and the huge

number of flags with these codes, some of which formed words.

BEN LANGLANDS

Yeah, we noticed that the city was absolutely shot to pieces, I mean there was barely one brick standing on another, but there were these signs for NGOs everywhere, and the streets were often teeming with new jeeps all emblazoned with the signs, the badges, the logos of these NGOs. And even when we talked to Afghan people they said, *who are all these people? What are they doing here? They were never here before, why are they all here now?* So we immediately we began to piece it together and we realized that what we were seeing was the sharp end of a whole world of, the sort of flipside of globalization in a way. The NGO is the kind of flipside of international commerce and politics and finance and it is also big business ... it's a very complex issue but we were really, stunned by it and intrigued and so we started to explore it. We started to record the signs that we saw everywhere, which then turned out to be a fairly ... this world where there were these signs and flags for NGOs everywhere, and you know they were everywhere, was really a temporary phase because, fairly soon afterwards the NGOs themselves became targets, and then they had to conceal their identity, they couldn't be so open, and they became the subject of attacks themselves and as they began to be seen by people as proxies for other interests.

Can you talk more specifically about the House of Osama bin Laden?

BEN LANGLANDS

Well we had heard, before leaving England, London, we had heard that there was a house where bin Laden had lived, from a friend of ours who is a photographer, and she remembered the name of the village and she told us the name of the village. We always thought you know, obviously we are interested in architecture and we are interested in the way buildings are evidence of the way people live so we thought well if it's possible to find this place and visit it, it would be interesting. And so when we arrived in Kabul we started asking people do you know about this house, and nobody we asked knew anything about it, and then we went to Bamyan where the giant Buddhas had been blown up by the Taliban and we went with 3 boys, a driver, a guide and an interpreter. We were just chatting to them and we said *you speak very good English, where did you learn the English?*, and they said *well we learnt it in Pakistan in refugee camps when we were children growing up*, and we said *are your families still in the refugee camps?* and they said *no they have just gone back to their village*, and it turned out to be in the same region. I said *where's this?* and they said *it's near Jalalabad*, so we asked them, well we heard that bin Laden lived in a house at Darunta near Jalalabad, and they said *yes that's true*, and we said *we had heard it's empty* and they said *no it's not empty it's being used as a base by the Hisbi Islaami militia*, and we said *oh right*, and

NIKKI BELL

We said can we visit the house? Would it be possible?

BEN LANGLANDS

We said is it safe to visit? And they said well it's safe if you come with us.

NIKKI BELL

We said *okay we will come with you* (laughs) *take us there.*

BEN LANGLANDS

And so yeah they took us there.

NIKKI BELL

And sure enough when we arrived you know this Hizbul group were fully armed, with beards, and we said to them *do you mind if we take some pictures?*, very naively, and they said *no, walk around* but they kept leaping into our pictures, 'course we didn't actually want people in our pictures but ...

BEN LANGLANDS

They would strike a pose with their AK47s every time we raised the camera (laughs).

NIKKI BELL

And there was live ammunition on the ground, I mean I took pictures of Ben's foot and he missed a wrapped up ...

BEN LANGLANDS

Yeah I mean, there were pallets full of missiles for rocket launchers, still with their cellophane wrapping on and their Czechoslovakian ...

NIKKI BELL

And if you had trodden in the wrong direction you would have been blown up instantly but I suppose naively again we weren't thinking about the danger, we were just incredibly wanting to record and explore the terrain where he had formerly lived.

BEN LANGLANDS

So we started taking photographs and we knew we only had about two and a half hours before we had to leave in order to get back to Kabul, so we started taking photos and we took hundreds and

hundreds of photos, working very quickly, and we started pacing out some of the distances, and then we were making notes in the notebook and then when we were pacing out the house there were some measurements that we wanted to take using a tape measure and we got out a tape measure, and we started measuring and suddenly the fighters suddenly stopped and came to us and said *wait what do you want measurements for? You didn't ask for measurements! You didn't tell us you needed measurements!* And we said, we had explained we were researching a commission for a museum in London and this had not really meant anything to them quite understandably, and so we said, well we explained that we might want to, we would want to take measurements because we might make a reconstruction of this house and they said *no you can't have measurements, that's absolutely forbidden you didn't ask for measurements.*

NIKKI BELL

They got quite heated at that point.

BEN LANGLANDS

They got quite upset.

NIKKI BELL

But we had already taken the measurements that we needed so that when we got back home eventually, we could build it with our engineer.

BEN LANGLANDS

So at that point our guide suddenly he said we can't stay, we must leave immediately, so we left.

NIKKI BELL

So we did.

BEN LANGLANDS

But luckily we had already taken many hundreds of photos so

Conceptually, how would you like people to view it, or respond to it?

NIKKI BELL

Conceptually it's an exploration of a house which he formerly occupied and it's a very, very modest dwelling. I think people are probably shocked by its modesty and its situation overlooking a beautiful lake. There was a bunker and even a little tiny mosque and the house itself was very, very simple and very bare, there was just a bed, and a few rickety chairs and some mats. I think you were really struck by that when you first went in, and a mud floor.

BEN LANGLANDS

The most interesting structure was the bunker which we reconstructed in some detail in the interactive artwork because the fighters told us that bin Laden, they told us that the house had always been there, they said it had been a farmhouse but they said that when bin Laden had arrived he had built the bunker with his team and also the little mosque, and they wouldn't let us near the mosque or in the mosque. They said *you can go to the bunker, explore the bunker*, the bunker was a really interesting structure, because it was made of stacked up wooden ammunition boxes, Soviet era ammunition boxes, which they filled with earth and rocks to make them heavy and solid and they had stacked them up like massive building blocks. And they had built the structure and then it had been roofed with redundant lorry chassis', steel lorry chassis' from sort of old Soviet transport, old tank transporters or something, and then they had covered the whole thing in tyres and then in earth and stones on top. So we found that, that was a very

kind of evocative structure.

NIKKI BELL

And inside as well it was amazing because it was all painted this extraordinary green, which was the same green as the Colony Room in the West End we used to frequent (laughs). It just had a few bags of onions, and you know a kind of torn up map and it was pretty threadbare too as well, but we did love it as a structure.

How do you think the work has changed? Obviously it was 10-11 years since you were there, with subsequent events, especially the death of bin Laden, do you think that's changed the work in some way?

BEN LANGLANDS

Since his death?

NIKKI BELL

Since his death, well I think it's a significant ... now it's almost like a piece of history, because I mean he did actually live there and people don't really have access to it unless they are able to explore it in some kind of way and we were very lucky to be in a situation where we could do that and where people in their own way can explore themselves the three spaces that we visited.

BEN LANGLANDS

I think it's ... the house and this compound is incredibly basic, it couldn't be more different, it's the absolute opposite of the Twin Towers in New York, you know massive gleaming structures in a city centre.

NIKKI BELL

And to think he was actually dreaming up and

planning these events from this place in the middle of nowhere by a lake, you know, is an extraordinary concept.

BEN LANGLANDS

The other thing is that you know it was very sparse and almost mundane by the end of this ... quite an exotic location on this promontory overlooking a lake, but also when bin Laden was killed and they released these pictures and videos of the compound where he was living in Abbottabad the thing that was striking about it, if anything, because actually the media at the time was saying this was a big compound, they were trying to make it out like some kind of fortress which it wasn't at all. It was really like many middle classes houses in Pakistan, but the thing that was striking about it when you saw these pictures of the interior was how mundane and scruffy and tatty it was and it was really like a kind of student house or something.

NIKKI BELL

It looked like student digs or something, you know.

How do you feel this work fits into the broader body of work, also called House of Osama bin Laden?

BEN LANGLANDS

Well we wanted to... we didn't want the work to just be about bin Laden's notoriety and we didn't want to just pile more myths onto the myths that had been created. So we were very conscious of him as a kind of quasi-mythical figure and even at that time nobody was totally sure whether he was dead or alive or whether he was in Afghanistan or in Britain,

or in the Gulf or anywhere, or Pakistan.

But the other thing that we really felt about the whole issue was that, going back to what we were saying before, it's really the context is geostrategic and it's about global power relations and a very long history of global power relations that go back easily to the mid 19th century with Britain and Russia and India and you know Afghanistan, Pakistan. So we wanted to introduce the wider context and that was our main reason in a way, in a personal sense, because we are very intuitively guided as artists. We wanted to talk about the conflict and the phenomena of bin Laden at many levels, so with the work and the NGOs we are talking about international geopolitics and finance, disaster relief being the flipside of international finance and economics, a globalized world.

And then with the film *Zardad's Dog** which is about a murder trial and in the film you see the trauma of the individuals that were terrorized or whose families were murdered by this man, this commander who was being tried. And so we wanted to approach the conflict and the whole context in Afghanistan on different levels, so we felt that we were examining it at a very personal level, at a regional level you know, at an international level and also in a kind of suspended metaphorical level. In a way the whole story of bin Laden has become a part of the entertainment industry really which was another reason for working with a computer game, the basic computer games technology.

NIKKI BELL

Taking out the adrenaline, instead.

BEN LANGLANDS

Exactly, taking out the adrenaline out of the game.

Can you talk a little bit about the thinking behind the print series world wide web.af?

BEN LANGLANDS

The suite of prints *world wide web.af* is very intimately connected and part of the trilogy of *The House of Osama bin Laden*, and the photographs that the works are based on, we took those while we were researching the trilogy in Afghanistan. We superimposed the codes, there are three sets of codes which we have superimposed over the images, of ruined palaces, of graveyards, the bunker that bin Laden built, Black Hawk helicopters, the American helicopters in the sky, and we have superimposed these codes which again are talking about the kind of the way, that this is just one sort of facet of globalized geopolitics and so the codes refer to the NGOs, the disaster relief agencies, and they refer to international destinations in aviation, the three letter identifier codes like JFK for New York, DMA for Damascus, LHR for London Heathrow or MAD for Madrid and ...

NIKKI BELL

And also the terrorism codes, the codes for terrorist organisations like IRA or for banned organizations.

BEN LANGLANDS

So yes, we are bringing together all these different languages really.

After this commission, how do you see your roles as artists in relation to war conflict?

NIKKI BELL

I think we can bring something much more independent, we were not in a sense aligned as journalists would be or the media, we are there in our own right and we don't have to report back to anyone and in a sense ...

BEN LANGLANDS

As artists you have constraints but we don't have editors and producers shouting in our ears, and I think with the news media it's a 24-hour agenda, very persistent, never ending, where things are substituted and overlaid one thing on top of another very quickly. Whereas with art you can hopefully, you've got more space to take a longer view of something, and more time. It's more contemplative rather than being about instant impact.

NIKKI BELL

Even members of the BBC who have visited Afghanistan would be staying in a compound which was guarded and they would have a lot more constraints, so to speak. We were able to go to Camp Souter, to Bagram, to Bamyan, find a route on our own, find our own drivers, talk to journalists, find out where the trial was taking place, be there, get permission the day before. So we had to take our own initiative and that's more exciting than having a controlled route, you wouldn't be able to make the same art if you were in that situation.

BEN LANGLANDS

I mean in an environment like that everything is extremely provisional, because all the established rules and norms have been thrown up into the air or blown to bits, and there are lots of people with different sort of purposes and agendas, but you

find yourself sharing information with people, we became friends with someone from *USA Today*, which is a newspaper we don't like reading at all, you know, but he was a really nice guy and we shared lots of information and we were able to take him to places that we wouldn't have been able to get to and he was able to take us to places, we went with him to a briefing of General Tommy Franks at Bagram airbase

NIKKI BELL

We wouldn't have known about that on our own...

BEN LANGLANDS

About sharing information and responding quickly to opportunities, but we weren't embedded with anybody, we were really on our own.

Do you feel that your work has a political dimension?

NIKKI BELL

I think all art has a political dimension and I think we are all very much aware of what's going on around us and as artists you try to make work that's relevant and that speaks to people and is meaningful.

BEN LANGLANDS

I mean these are the things that we are interested in and things that we feel emotional about I suppose as well. And the things that we want to know more about and explore and so you know as artists we use an aesthetic framework and conceptual framework for exploring these issues but I think lots of people are interested in these issues.

It feels like your response is very 'cool', if that's the right word? It's very controlled, on such emotive subject matter?

BEN LANGLANDS

In our art we try to be in some ways quite analytical, we try not to be really emotional, because I think we really care about the structure of things, because we think about revealing structures we can discover the way things relate to each other. Going back to what we said at the beginning you know our work really is about relationships between individuals, between countries, between groups, relationships of exchange and communication. So I think in order to reveal these things, our way of doing it. I'm not saying it's the only way of doing it or the best way, but our way of doing it, is just to reveal the structure, we don't use tons of colour, we don't use a lot of emotional gestures, we ... in some ways its quite analytical I suppose.

NIKKI BELL

But through a formal beauty we hope people will plunge in.

It's almost as if you have developed a kind of graphic language of your own to present your subject matter, is that intentional?

NIKKI BELL

Well I think particularly with the codes, which we have developed in all sorts of ways. I think as the world gets more complex and systems multiply, we have more and more need to simplify, these

acronyms and codes are becoming more and more a part of our lives just because we can't hold all of that information in our heads.

How do you feel about the label 'war artist'?

BEN LANGLANDS

We just know its shorthand for ... we think it's a bit unfortunate because, we are artists.

NIKKI BELL

We don't like being pigeonholed or put in a box because we are artists foremost and that is who we are. However for the purpose of doing this extremely interesting commission to examine the aftermath of September the 11th, then yes, we can be war artists for that but it depends on our next project what we might be then.

BEN LANGLANDS

Then we will be airplanes artists, or architecture artists, we're always being called architecture artists.

Has this project changed your practice?

NIKKI BELL

We have certainly gone to very extraordinary places, I mean we visited Rwanda and all the genocide sites. I think it's made us more adventurous, even though we love travelling and exploring, I think it added another layer that we wouldn't have had the opportunity of experiencing.

Since making The House of Osama bin Laden, several artists and academics have talked about the relationships between computer games, weapons, conflict. I wondered how important that was to you at the time of making this work or if it's something that's come to the fore afterwards?

NIKKI BELL

I think we were working alongside that technology, weren't we; we actually made a work in Turner's studio before we made this piece, The House of Osama bin Laden.

BEN LANGLANDS

We had started working with this technology in about 2001; we did an exhibition in 2002.

NIKKI BELL

Working with V/Space Lab in Turner's studio, where we recreated the hallway leading to his actual studio which you could physically enter.

BEN LANGLANDS

And then we combined Turner's Studio at Petworth House in Sussex with our studio in Whitechapel in London, so you had this kind of ...

NIKKI BELL

Ancient and modern, contemporary and this juxtaposition which people could explore both. That sort of led onto us wanting to make another virtual model, so that definitely inspired us at that point.

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