

wtf

by Darrin Little

"One day there will be a museum dedicated to the conflict in Iraq. Until then we have to imagine what it might contain."

—Jeremy Deller, British artist

JEREMY DELLER'S SPECULATION about a future Iraq War museum runs Charles Ray's entire artistic career into the end zone for the immaculate touchdown. The ability to qualify the American and British hegemonic death and destruction campaign in Iraq as a "conflict" is the ultimate perceptual trick. Does Deller's appropriated car at the Hammer Museum — a charred remnant of a suicide bomber's Jack-in-the-Box routine — deliver shock and awe? Does its temporary parking spot in the courtyard "keep it real?" On the contrary, Deller's automotive evangelizing at the Hammer, as well as at the MCA in Chicago and the New Museum in New York, demonstrates the chilling extent to which art galleries

and museums castrate tragedy. When a truth to be reckoned with is framed by an art institution — especially here in Hollywood-hardened Los Angeles — it's always subjugated to an attendant butler pouring wine at dinner, whose end result is not the actual saving of lives, but curatorial gold stars and the guarantee of more "concerned" art exhibitions.

Jeremy wants dinner conversation; so do Laura Hoptman, Amy Mackie and Nato Thompson, the respective curators of this nomadic charade, "It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq." Wouldn't you like to spend your lunch hour in the Hammer's lovely garden with Sgt. Jonathan Harvey, a decorated psych specialist in charge of a detachment of American soldiers in northwest Baghdad? Yes, Sgt. Harvey, tell me about your experiences in Iraq, your service to your country. Could you offer your reflections on the art of Iraq? Specifically, if you see the irony in your active engagement with this traveling art exhibition — as opposed to your ordered disengagement from the tragic looting of Baghdad's National Museum of Antiquities during the U.S. invasion in 2003? This particular Iraqi museum is

(or was) regarded as one of the 10 most important in the world — on par with the Louvre. The Nazis knew enough about the value of art to have the good sense to systematically loot and stockpile it at the Louvre during their occupation of France. Sgt. Harvey, does George W. Bush know what art is? Do you know what art is?

The Italian Futurists glorified war as "the only cure for the world." WWI shut them up fast enough. But six years of the Iraq War and we're still talking. Iraq was the birthplace of civilization. Los Angeles, also situated in the desert, is its decadent end. We willingly go into debt to purchase SUVs that guzzle Persian oil, but won't raise taxes on gasoline, which could obliterate the tragedy of Skid Row, not to mention finance a viable mass transit system. In LA, we receive the spectacle of an automotive carcass from a famous street in Baghdad (Al-Mutanabbi) in the same way we receive a Charles Manson T-shirt from a vendor on Hollywood Boulevard: amiably, without conscience. Deller's appropriated death car defiles both the memory of its victims and the moral capacity of its viewers. ☹

darrin@darrinlittle.com

I'D
RATHER
FEEL
LUCKY

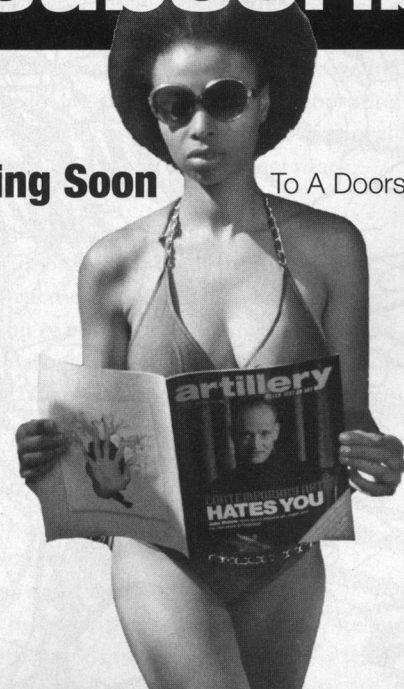
GOOD LUCK CULT

www.FortunaNow.com

subscribe

Coming Soon

To A Doorstep Near You!



It's so easy now with PayPal visit: artillerymag.com
or mail check to: Artillery, PO Box 26234, LA, CA 90026
\$27 for 1 year (6 issues) • \$45 for 2 years (12 issues)