

# SERGE ZIEGLER GALERIE

at

## Brooke Alexander

59 Wooster Street NY NY 10012 T. 212 925 43 38 F. 212 941 95 65

presents **Larry Deyab**

September, 15<sup>th</sup> through October 7th 2006

Opening reception 16<sup>th</sup> of September 10 am through 6 pm

The paintings of Larry Deyab rely on different sources for their imagery - the "official" approved media shots, front-page photographs from the New York Times, "unofficial" internet pictures, and film images both famous and fleeting from the cinema. Recent visual references which he chose for his painterly reflection play a specific role in the American collective memory such as the dead bodies of Saddam Hussein's sons laid out for inspection to the American and Iraqi public or the hanging ones of the American contractors in Falluja. In addition images which have never been shown in the mainstream US media, though freely available on the Internet if one chooses to look. The painting "Chechen Rebels" was inspired after the artist found images of a dead Chechen leader memorialized in a "Tribute to Ibn Ul Khattab" on a web site called jihadunspun.net.

Whatever their initial purpose, these images have changed the American perception of war and the way it is being represented, much as Eddie Adams photograph of police General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a horrified Viet Cong prisoner (see the painting "Viet Cong Prisoner") or Nick Ut's photograph of the naked little Vietnamese girl Kim Phuc running down the road, her clothes burned off by napalm, revealed another aspect of the Viet Nam War to the American public of the late 1960's. These are the images with which Deyab grew up with as a child in era of LIFE Magazine and the photojournalism of 1960's America.

Today the serving up of the visually horrific has become a task of the entertainment industry, not the news media. The US government and the self-censorship of the mainstream media ban images of extreme war violence and dead bodies, even the dead American soldiers in their flag-draped coffins returning home from Iraq. Instead, it is replaced by the artificial violence of the Hollywood film industry and of video games devoid

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of any meaning, as well as the "embedded images" of the press, which conceal the horror of real events, rather than revealing them. Reacting to this contradiction, all Deyab's paintings allude to the theme of open or hidden violence, be it traces of war, victims or enemies. The tortured body and halting steps of the figure in "John Merrick" could be caused by genetics or war.

Borrowing some minimalist devices, Deyab translates them into his specific painterly language, except that the figure emerges from the often-monochrome background, referring to their photographic kinship. Whatever images Deyab chooses, they can be described as traumatic and "incapable of resolution or catharsis, taken up the cusp of life and death" (Abigail Solomon-Godeau). The painting "Clockwork (Dog)" is based on the famous rape scene in Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange." In "Falluja (Blue Sky)" the dark, tortured silhouette of the dead American contractor is seen against the blue sky of that day. In portraying this, the artist points to the very core of the contradictions that recently appeared in the American society: what can be shown and what should not be shown. Few issues have provoked more public clamor in the last few years. In his paintings, Deyab focuses on detail, introduces unexpected close-ups, and distorts the composition, imposing on the spectator a reflective distance. Countering official photography's aestheticizing method, his reductive palette crystallizes the very quality that is absent in the official photography and artificialized in Hollywood cinema: the real horror of events they are failing to represent.

Evoking a long history of the representation of violence, from Francisco Goya's "Disasters of War" to Kubrick to David Lynch's "Elephant Man," Deyab's work points to Susan Sontag whose thoughts on the subject she expressed in her last book "Regarding the Pain of Others." "The image, immaterial in itself, especially when digitally registered, is nonetheless emitted into the real, not virtual world, where it will be encountered by real, not virtual subjectivities."

Elena Sorokina

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