

“Age of Terror: Art since 9/11”

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

Lambeth Road

October 26–May 28

The “Age of Terror”—could there be a more dismal art show for the grimmest museum in London? And yet there are seemingly jaunty works to be found here, with Mona Hatoum’s *Natura morta (bow-fronted cabinet)*, 2012, showing gaudy glass hand grenades resembling Christmas-tree decorations, and Jitish Kallat’s miniaturized security-line figurines—*Circadian Rhyme 1*, 2011—looking like an adult Playmobil set. Whether inadvertent or not, it is telling that this large fifty-piece show problematizes the representation of war. There is Cory Arcangel’s thrift-store find *Bomb Iraq*, 2005, an innocent-looking homemade video game from the 1991 Gulf War, and Gerhard Richter’s *September*, 2009, a print of a painting of the Twin Towers aflame that feels uncomfortably like hotel kitsch.

A protagonist in Don DeLillo’s novel *Falling Man* (2007), reflects about a friend: “Maybe he was a terrorist but he was one of ours, she thought . . . which meant godless, Western, white.” Such disconcerting ambiguities mark the best work here, including Kerry Tribe’s casting-call film *Untitled (Potential Terrorist)*, 2002, and John Smith’s perfectly guileless video *Throwing Stones, (Hotel Diaries #3)*, 2004, where his camera surveils a room as he idly soliloquizes about inconsequential and world-changing events.

But the main grouping of relatively detached and conceptually assured art-world familiars is mirrored by a selection of artists from countries the West has, in the wake of 9/11, bombed to oblivion.

Three brutally direct videos stand out in particular. Khaled

Abdulwahed’s *Tuj*, 2012, shows a child’s soccer ball repeatedly bouncing off an interior wall in Damascus as sounds of outside explosions increase. In Lida Abdul’s *White House*, 2005, she whitewashes the ruins of a presidential palace on the outskirts of Kabul, while in *Homesick*, 2014, Hrair Sarkissian demolishes a model of the Damascus apartment building his parents refuse to leave. Such art goes straight to the heart of the matter.

— Mark Harris



Mona Hatoum, *Natura morta (bow-fronted cabinet)*, 2012, Murano mirrored glass, wood, glass cabinet, 51 x 24 x 12".