



Stephen Andrews, *Friendly Fire* (a BBC cameraman also received minor injuries but continued to film with his blood dripping on the lens), 2003, Crayon rubbing on parchment, 48 x 61 cm, Collection of Salah Bachir

Stephen Andrews CUE ART FOUNDATION, NEW YORK

Last fall, New York was a good place for a dissenter. An energized anti-authoritarian spirit, galvanized by the city's hosting of the Republican National Convention and an upcoming presidential election, was in the air. It worked its way into the museums and galleries as well. At the Whitney was an excellent series of documentary and experimental films called "WAR! Protest in America, 1965 – 2004." Downtown, a group show entitled "AmBUSH!" made no secret of its target. It was an illuminating context for the Canadian artist Stephen Andrews to debut an exhibition of new drawings on the war in Iraq.

Nestled among some of New York's poshest private galleries and eminent public art institutions, CUE Art Foundation exhibits work by artists who are "unknown or under-recognized" (at least in New York City), in a bright, spacious gallery equal to nay in its Chelsea neighbourhood. CUE's modus operandi is to select a guest curator for each exhibition, who in turn invites an artist to exhibit their work. It is a fresh, cross-disciplinary approach that allows the curators to exercise creative latitude and a certain enlightened self-interest in their choices. Concurrent to Andrews's show was an exhibition of paintings by the legendary comic-book artist Jerry Moriarty, curated by fellow comic artist and long-time New Yorker contributor Art Spiegelman. Andrews's work was curated by the Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan.



Stephen Andrews, *Checkpoint*, 2003, Crayon rubbing on parchment, 48 x 61 cm

Andrews's drawings are recreations of images of the war in Iraq drawn from the Internet. The artist kept to source material outside of the mainstream media's vocabulary; before Abu Ghraib made depictions of American abuse of Iraqi prisoners infamous, Andrews was working with pictures from Iraq that were at odds with the officially sanctioned narrative of the war's progress. So we are shown mistreated prisoners, some naked, some hooded, troublesome checkpoints, wounded and grieving Iraqis, even the view through the blood-spotted camera lens of a journalist injured in a friendly-fire incident.

The drawings are executed with crayons, using a rubbing process against window screening that gives the surfaces a uniform dotted texture. The configuration of dots resembles the characteristic pattern of the four-colour separation method used in printing. Andrews's process softens the images' colour and sharp edges – they might be gentle watercolours – but on approaching the drawings to appreciate their detail and texture, one is repelled anew by the imagery. The dotted surfaces also mimic the graininess of raw or clandestine journalistic footage, confusing the distinction between documentary and impressionistic modes of witnessing.

Dominating one wall is a series of 190 animation stills (each a separate drawing) that are the basis of a short clip that plays on a monitor near the gallery's entrance. On the wall, the massed drawings fade into unreadability. On the monitor screen, the animation, which records the aftermath of the fatal wounding of a single Iraqi, amazes with its undulating, virtuoso beauty. In a conflict where the New York Times routinely carries front-page photographs of American soldiers romantically silhouetted against the desert sunset, Andrews's

aestheticization of the images of war seems knowing, or even confrontational, rather than in any way comforting or anaesthetizing.

Those familiar with Andrews's earlier work might be surprised by the choice of subject matter, but will recognize the methodology and aims of his current work. In other projects, Andrews has poignantly hand-drawn images derived from or connected to various formats of the mass media, such as film and newspapers, with the idea of reintroducing human subjectivity into the technologies of objective truth. Inevitably, the Iraq drawings also raise the issue of media responsibility. We are dependent upon reporting and technology to learn about events beyond our own experience, but the reproductional gaps that are part of these drawings' dotted surfaces only give rise to imaginings of what is left out. Andrews has long sought to expose and bridge the alarming disconnect that exists between public events and our understanding of their impact on individual lives, and in this lie his contribution and his work's power. Digital devices have made images of war ubiquitous and easy to harvest. The painstaking attention that Andrews has given to just a handful of captured instants reminds us that, when lives are at stake, every moment is a decisive one.

by Lorissa Sengara



Stephen Andrews, *Counting the days (after TIME)*, 2004, Crayon rubbing on parchment, 48 x 61 cm