

contemporary

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REVIEWS

NEW YORK: SMACK MELLON GALLERY

ON THE SUBJECT OF WAR

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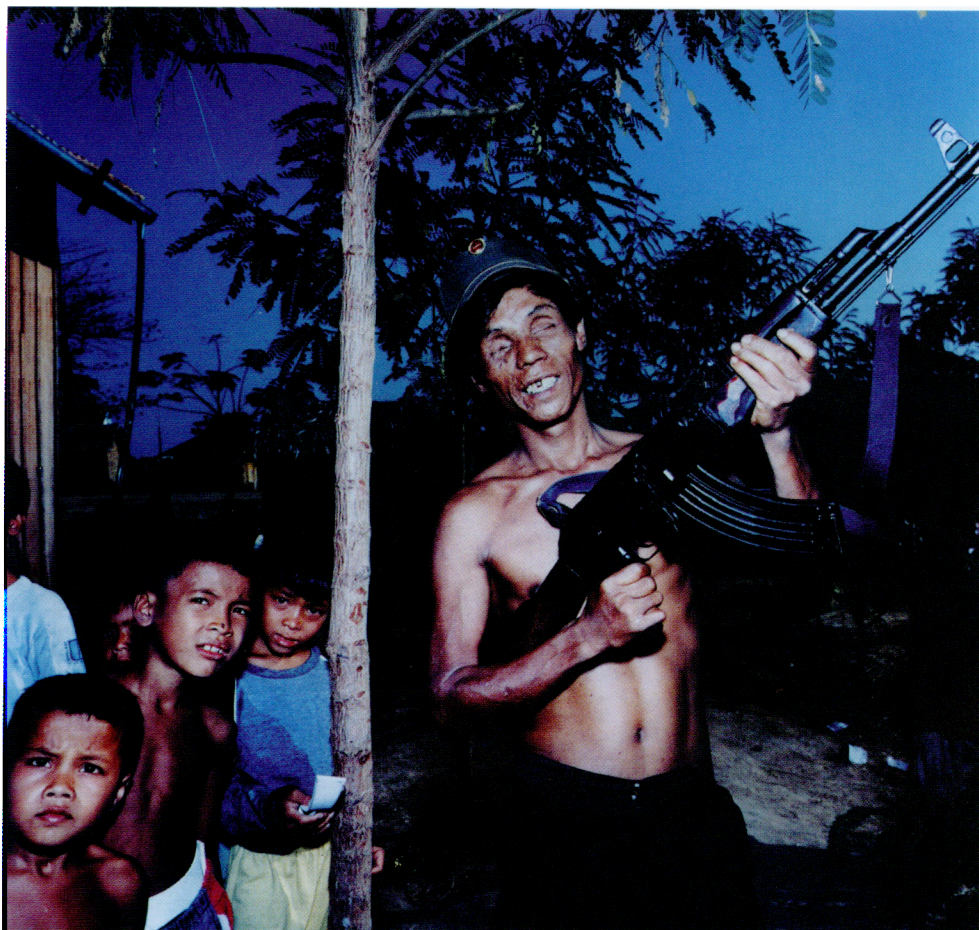
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The reality of international conflict can reach Western citizens very superficially through the publication of individual photographs. These fragments consequently minimize the lived drama of life-and-death battles rather than maximize it. The tragic sting of nation building exposes itself in 'On the Subject of War', a group exhibition featuring an array of photojournalism, video and multi-media installation, as well as painting and embroidery.

Purple Hearts, Back from Iraq (2004) by Nina Berman is a series of 12 photographs portraying young soldiers wounded in the battles raging across Afghanistan and Iraq. Damaged limbs, psychologies and physiognomies abound, making one wonder if this is really freedom or a government's greed. Susan Meiselas also captures the savage face of civil war seen throughout the last three decades in Nicaragua, Kurdistan and El Salvador. Equally disturbing is Ron Haviv's *Images of War*, which points out that George W Bush used one of his photographs taken in Panama as a means to exercise war.

In contrast, Asente used mechanical embroidery to create three pieces titled *Ground Explosions* (2004-5), outlining the resonance of combustion with black thread. Similarly, Eve Sussman presents the short film *Solace* (2001), which interlaces scenes of everyday life with the attacks on the World Trade Center, as witnessed from Brooklyn. Melissa Dubbin and Aaron S. Davidson explore the trajectory of mechanical motion in the animation *Weather Patterns*, while the methodology of war tactics appears in Patricia Thornley's *SEVEN*, which consists of three laptop computers in front of seven photographs of Disney's dwarfs. Juxtaposing fear with pleasure, the artist presents a series of short films that take the viewer on a voyeuristic hunt through fields and around homes. As evidenced in Bobby Neel Adams's photographs *Broken Wings* (1997), any war like that in Cambodia only fragments people on a physical and psychological level. Presented in honour of Susan Sontag, this show reveals the duplicitous yet complicated nature of photography. Yet war images, no matter how graphic, will always fail, as they can never export the full horror of the battlefield.

JILL CONNER



Above: Bobby Neel Adams, *blinded by blast, near Phnom Penh*, 1992. Below: Bobby Neel Adams, *Francisco at garden, Tica railroad station*, 1994. Courtesy: the artist

