

Bedtime Stories

A video installation by Mike Stubbs



Highlights from

the Gulf War

7 September – 13 October 1991

City Art Galleries, Mosley Street, Manchester

Numbers dead:

Iraqi 40,000 – 200,000

Allied forces 146

The B.B.C. banned 67 records

during the Gulf War including:

'We can work it out' The Beatles


'Killing me softly with his song' Roberta Flack

'Boom bang a bang' Lulu

'Imagine' John Lennon

'Give peace a chance' John Lennon

commissioned by Manchester City Art Galleries



I was not consulted on whether we should fight, I was instead invited to watch the televised spectacle. Lying passively in my bed all I could do was worry in my sleep. Despite wrestling with the morality of being a member of a nation waging war I found myself powerless. From the comfort of my armchair I watched the destruction of a country.

As part of the public I attempted to form an opinion but informed by what and by whom? Was it a territorial war to 'liberate' Kuwait or the defence of oil reserves and prices or simply a holy war? A virtual war, fought on paper, with computer, in banks and on television. So much speculation, so little knowledge, so much propaganda. Between devising 'war spirit' contingency plans, indulging in battle strategy and theorising the *virtuality* of the event, one thing was clear: the totally inappropriate nature of our response to the limited information available to us.

I do not know whether I will ever know what really happened. I stopped watching televised news coverage to avoid subjecting myself to further propaganda; protected by my consciousness from further dark images, or was it guilt? Is it possible for an individual in a democratic society to sleep easily whilst their armed forces on the instruction of the government destroy a country? Described by an American soldier



as a 'Turkey Shoot' the allied forces continued bombing after an Iraqi surrender. The 'allied' forces have not been seen to conduct a massacre; they left an unstable situation to destroy itself through civil war, yet even now the USA, UK and France are still talking of going on further bombing raids to finish off Iraqi installations capable of producing materials for the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

In May I visited a friend. On the day that I arrived he received a letter from Paris from his cousin who had managed to telephone another cousin in Baghdad. The letter told of how Mark's four cousins despite being in the Republican guard, had survived the war. That letter was the first communication from Iraq. Until then fears for the family had been high.

Mike Stubbs .

"...Distance between self and my most precious people eating into the worry zone. 250 miles here, thousands there. Living in a different city to my lover becoming newly upsetting. Those with children reeling under the intense logic of children. Those who lived through the last war being able to conceptualise the new war, only as the old war. At the outbreak of war I imagined anything happening and felt certain that the UK would be under attack. Suddenly calculating the inherent risk of being situated in a city whose industries



or geographical location make it a site of 'high' risk or 'greater' risk, 'lesser' risk or 'unknown' risk. Sudden realisation that all locations are mysterious in this respect and that the chances of discovering the function of certain buildings or workers is minimal."

Nina Edge .

Martha was born to Christine Robinson and Richard Downes on day 13 of the war. They feature in the video projected onto the bed.

"I felt fear, frightened because I knew the unborn child wriggling in my arms would have to learn that people will oppress each other for oil. And when I saw the black seas and the burning skies I felt hopeless and wondered what poisoned world would be left for her to grow up in."

Christine Robinson .

"Feelings about imminent parenthood at the start of the Gulf War... The feeling of impotent anger remains strong in my memory. Tony Benn spoke of the 'odious stench of hypocrisy' that 'stuck in his gullet' – these words stay with me. I felt very angry that decisions were being made for the vanity of power and the distorted views and speculation we were receiving from press and politicians alike were somehow missing the point:– that of obliteration of a people and the devastation that would surely be wreaked.



I started to write a letter to my unborn child. I felt this war and the arrogant decisions that led to it, would continue to reinforce the macho and aggressive world in which she would grow. I wanted her to grow as fresh hope – this war offered none."

Richard Downes .

"The Gulf War was not just a conflict fought by the 28 nation strong coalition against the armies of Iraq. It was a war fought against the backdrop of global television. The war created a new series of television icons: Scuds vs Patriots; Nintendo style military videos; oil smeared cormorants; battered PoW's; blazing Kuwaiti oil wells; the Amiriya bunker; the carnage on the 'Road to Hell'. It also saw the emergence of the reporter-as-star: Peter Arnett for CNN in Baghdad and NBC's Arthur 'Scud Stud' Kent. But how much were we really told? How far did censorship by both Iraqis and the coalition keep the 'real war' off our television screens. And how far was all that speculation by the army of pundits a substitute for hard information as to what was really going on?"

Dr. Philip M. Taylor of the Institute of Communication Studies, Leeds University, on some of the questions addressed in his book *War and the Media*, to be published by Manchester University Press in February, 1992.

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Open Daily 10.00 - 5.45 Sunday 2.00 - 5.45

This leaflet designed, printed and sponsored by The Print Industry.

Mike Stubbs was born in 1958. He studied at Cardiff College of Art and the Royal College of Art. His work encompasses film, video, mixed media installations and performance and has been shown in Britain and throughout Europe and Australia. His film and video work has been broadcast on Channel 4, S4C, HTV, Swedish and French television.

He is the Artistic Co-ordinator of Hull Time Based Arts.

Other recent video installations by Mike Stubbs.

DESERT ISLAND DREAD

Commissioned by Merseyside Moviola for *Video Positive* festival. Exhibited at the Bluecoat Gallery and Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, 1989.

THEME SHOPPING TIME BOMB PARK

In collaboration with Dick Powell. Commissioned by Moviola for 'North Face'. Exhibited at Bluecoat Gallery, 1990.

HERE COMES ANOTHER JELLY RABBIT

In collaboration with Dick Powell.
Is Modern Life Rubbish? Ferens Art Gallery, 1991.

Special thanks to: Lucy Casson, Richard Downes, Nina Edge, Andy Hazell, Rowena Jenner, Keith Khan, Dick Powell, Christine Robinson, Graham Scott, Dr. Philip M. Taylor, Tim Wilcox.



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