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EXHIBITIONS, INTERVIEWS

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Reimagining War Beyond its Exceptionality

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© Shaun Gladwell, Double Field - Viewfinder, (Tarin Kowt), 2009–10. Two-channel HD video, 18-39 minutes, 16-9, colour, stereo sound. Commissioned by the Australian War Memorial. All images courtesy of King's College London

A new exhibition from King's College London hopes to represent the paradoxical dynamic of war and the everyday.

The inescapable horrors of war have arguably come to define our modern world.

With the ongoing refugee crisis, the endless atrocities unfolding at the hands of ISIS and the Yemen war making headlines, both domestic and international conflicts continue to mark our global landscape.

Though the world has become a much less violent place since the end of the Second World War, the last decade has seen an increase in terrorism and violence – with the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), finding that out of 162 countries, only 11 of the world's nations are in a full state of peace.

In our ever globalised world, these conflicts will continue to effect us, both at home and abroad.

Aerial I, from the Film Shadow Sites II, 2011 © Jananne Al-Ani

Traces of War is a major new exhibition which seeks to show that war is not confined to moments of crisis or battlefield locations; but rather a force which disrupts the normality of everyday life.

Internationally renowned artists Jananne Al-Ani, Baptist Coelho, and Shaun Gladwell explore the most enduring, and, some would argue, most dangerous aspect of conflict – its presence and intersection with the everyday.

"Beneath it all… I am human…", courtesy of the artist and Project 88, Mumbai © Baptist Coelho

Working primarily with photography, film and multi-media installations, they expose the more quotidian side of warfare.

From their respective experiences in Iraq, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and then 'back home' where the traces of war are revealed again, all three artists are sensitive to traces of war and their residual effects in the domestic sphere.

BPOV MEAO, (behind point of view, Middle East Area of Operations) 2009-10. Commissioned by the Australian War Memorial © Shaun Gladwell

“I wanted to hand the cameras over,” explains Shaun Gladwell. “I was interested in how people were recording their lives, in how video and digital photography play an important role in representing lives and how people understand their own place in their own environments.”

“It’s something that we all do, but it’s interesting that this continues into the war zone.”

The Australian artist, who served as his country’s official war artist in the first Gulf War and later in Afghanistan, uses his photography to critically analyse the use of cameras and filmography in warfare.

BPOV MEAO, (behind point of view, Middle East Area of Operations) 2009-10. Commissioned by the Australian War Memorial © Shaun Gladwell

'Double Field/Viewfinder (Tarin Kowt)' was produced during the artist's tenure in Afghanistan. The moving image lends itself to the exploration of the role of technology, communications and surveillance, in contemporary warfare.

For example, a synchronised dual-channel video, televised on two screens facing one another presents two soldiers stood in the Afghan desert. These two figures, rendered in slow-motion, are caught in a standoff as they simultaneously circle, imitate and shoot one another with their hand-held cameras.

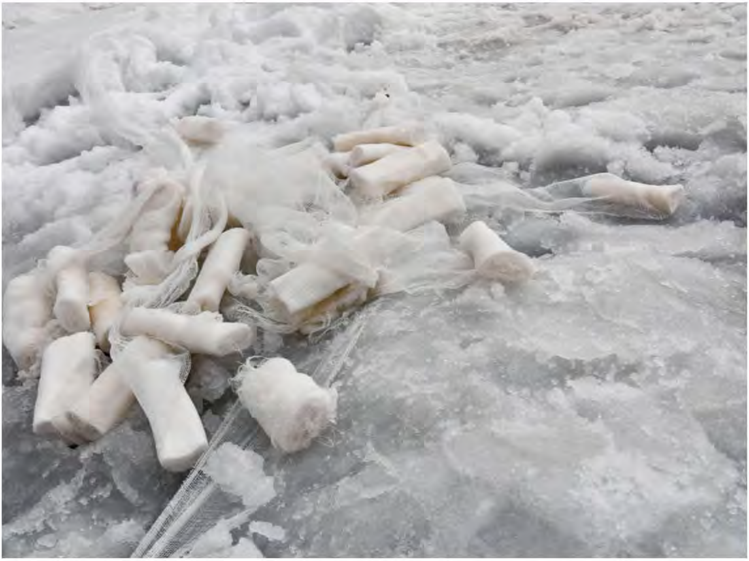
In Gladwell's photography and video, it is the camera which in retaining situational elements of the body destabilises the time and space of war.

"Beneath it all… I am human…", courtesy of the artist and Project 88, Mumbai © Baptist Coelho

The silent roar of battle is differently seen in Mumbai based artist, Baptist Coelho's multi-media installations.

In 2007, Coelho responded to *The Peace Project* by the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Colorado, with the artwork '537', a sculptural work inspired by the satellite view of the Siachen glacier; the highest battleground on earth and disputed region of Kashmir which has seen ongoing military conflict between India and Pakistan since 1984.

"This distant view prompted me to further excavate this conflict," says Coelho, who took several trips to Ladakh in the north of India to discover its origins and consequences. "The un-understanding is one of the many reasons I have engaged with it from various levels."



Altitude Sickness, Frostbite, Chilblains, Arterial Hypertension © Baptist Coelho

For *Traces of War*, he realises the everydayness of war, by making use of what he has referred to as the 'fabric' of war; the literal materials of a life lived in battle zones where no battle as such takes place.

Objects such as jars of food, bandages, soldiers' uniforms and backpacks are sent to unlikely spaces so that the audience is never quite sure of the measure of distance between home and the front line.

Still from Black Powder Peninsular, 2016 © Jananne Al-Ani

Taking a different perspective, Iraqi born artist Jananne Al-Ani's films reveal traces of conflict and occupation in seemingly unexpected places.

'Shadow Sites I' (2010) and 'Shadow Sites II' (2011) show aerial views of contested landscapes that suggest war's imprint upon a surface is itself only comprehensible when seen from above.

"My interest in the representation of sites of conflict began with the '91 Gulf War, in which the prominent role of digital technology, aerial photography and satellite imagery created a watershed in the history of war reportage," says Al-Ani.

"By adopting the bird's eye view of the fighter pilot or the cruise missile, it was possible to represent the landscape of the Middle East as a barren, unoccupied desert – an Orientalist idea that persists to this day," she explains. "By appropriating this aerial perspective, I hope to expose the signs and traces of complex and sophisticated human activity embedded in the landscape, which are so often overlooked."

Aerial VI, from the Film Shadow Sites II, 2011 © Jananne Al-Ani

The films, both shot in the Middle East, are shown alongside the artist's latest video work *Black Powder Peninsular* – an aerial journey across the UK.

By treating the British landscape in much the same way that the Middle Eastern landscape has been portrayed, Al Ani's exposes the relationships that bind them together.

Aerial IV, from the Film Shadow Sites II, 2011 © Jananne Al-Ani

“My father is Iraqi and my mother was born in England to Irish parents, so the legacy of British Imperial and military intervention has shaped my life, as it has countless others across the globe.”
“Not a single year has passed in the last century without British troops being engaged militarily somewhere in the world,” says Al Ani. “We are all living in the shadow of war whether or not we are at the sharp end of the battle.”

Traces of War is on show at Kings College London, Inigo Rooms, Somerset House East Wing, until 18 December 2016. For more, go here.