

“God’s Wars” : “Looking into the Silence to Find the Answers”

By [Felicity Arbuthnot](#)

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*Beneath the “shock and awe” geopolitics of the Bush- Blair “humanitarian crusade”, **Felicity Arbuthnot** reflects on the indescribable barbarity of the 2004 Fallujah massacre, resulting in countless deaths and destruction.*

*And it has happened ever since. They are killing our children. Ask **Madeleine Albright**. It's called “Responsibility to Protect”:*

“We're the good guys. We are Americans. We are fighting a gentleman's war here ...”

This article was published almost 12 years ago on September 27, 2011

“When words fail us, we need to look in to the silence in order to find the answers.” **May Ayres.**

Sometimes a poem is a soul on a page, sometimes a scream. May Ayres sculptures are also both.

“God’s Wars”, her first solo exhibition since 1985, in a historic East London church: “presents meditations on war and peace, selected from her ‘War of Aggression’ series, which has been created out of anger over the last seven years.”



Only the obtuse would ask where the title came from for these searing “ceramic pictures”, displaying towering compassion for the battered, broken, degraded victims – the face of indescribable barbarity generated by the “we pray together” Bush and Blair’s “Crusade.”

“Demonic Principles”, is the tooled up US soldier, standing over a piles of small, naked forms, buttocks facing the viewer, feet twisted, each body seemingly foetal curved, utterly vulnerable, perhaps attempting helpless self-protecting. The soldier is two headed, one a

fanged demon. Abu Ghraib brought to account – in a house of God.

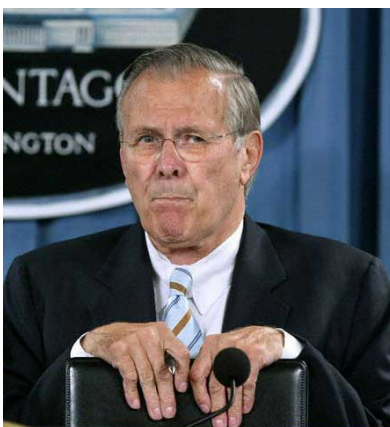
“A Gentleman’s War”, is a quote taken from US Lieutenant Colonel Willy Buhl, Commander of a Marine battalion, in Fallujah’s 2004 massacre, which destroyed seventy percent of homes in the ancient, western Iraq city: “We’re the good guys. We are Americans. We are fighting a gentleman’s war here ...”



The bombing of Fallujah

Ayres’ response is a woman (46 cm) her grief palpable, touchable, one hand over her face – the other holding a tiny severed hand in the palm.

An infant form, with little hands of exquisite perfection, seemingly huddled in a damaged pot, urn, or maybe even returned to the womb – the latter, a theme of protection depicted by another of sculptures greats, Iraq’s Mohammad Ghani Hickmet, during the bombings and embargo – is entitled: “Even the Children.”



An eloquent riposte to then US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, who said of Fallujah:

“Innocent civilians have all the guidance they need as to how they can avoid getting in to trouble.”

The assault on Fallujah has been compared to Guernica, Dresden, even Hiroshima, given the

horror of the weapons used and their lasting genetic and cancer causing legacy. What is certain, is that there was no place to hide.

“Indifference”, is a casual, slouched group: **Condoleezza Rice**, possibly General Mark “it is not productive to count Iraqi lives” Kimmit, and including one not unlike **Hillary Clinton**.

An army boot is in danger of, un-noticingly, stepping on an infant’s face. Ms Rice, seems to have grown a gargoyle-like witness, from her shoulder. The title is inspired by George Bernard Shaw’s quotation: **“The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference.”**

“We think the Price is Worth it”, is entitled for the then Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, who opined that the lives of half a million Iraqi children, were just that, on “60 Minutes” (12th May 1996.) The response is a figure beyond despair, her face in her hands (46 cm high) a figure visitors to Iraq over the years, know so well – so helplessly.

Anthony Charles Lynton Blair, QC., has a special place. He is kneeling, hands clasped, in immaculate black dress dinner suit, white shirt and bow tie. Appropriately, two faced, one pious, smug, the other manic, demonic. He kneels on a wasteland of bodies, faces, despairing, reposed, bewildered, entombed, enwombed – dead.

Behind him, from an ancient iron stairwell, fixed to the hewn stones, silent witness to near two centuries, hangs a noose.

The title is: “ ... and by the way. God Bless you all ...”

The young man, stripped to the waist on a near Mesopotamian plinth, doubled over, has his arm twisted behind him, by a vast American soldier, speaking not his language, without knowledge of his culture. The viewer has to stand underneath and look up, to see his youthful, bewildered face.

Amal’s damaged, beautiful, vulnerable, face, slender body, has crept in from Palestine and December 2008-January 2009’s assault on the Gaza Strip’s population, walled in and massacred by a people who were donated by Arthur Balfour: “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people ... ”

Not permission for destruction of the Palestinians, their homes, rights, brains, lives..

“Operation Cast Lead”, left her, as diagnosed by an Israeli doctor, having to: “... learn to live with the shrapnel in her head.” Amal means Hope.

The sinister figure of **John Negroponte**, allegedly having been responsible for unspeakable atrocities as US Ambassador to Honduras in the 1980’s and whose arrival as Ambassador in Iraq in 2003 coincided with them there, slumps, pointy faced and dead eyed in the foyer, as the worn, ancient steps are mounted to the exhibition.

Just one plinth is temporarily empty. It is of: “Barbarity”, a tiny figure to touch any heart, unless stone. A broken headed baby, shrouded, each shred of which has a carefully written scream of wars’ crimes, illegalities and inhumanities.

It is being displayed in a tribute to Mohammad Ghani Hikmet, who died, exiled by liberation,

the day after the 11th September commemorations this month.

“Confrontational, eloquent and devastatingly human, the finely crafted depictions of barbaric acts of oppression in her hybrids of sculpture, drawing, portraiture and caricature express her attempts to address some of the costs of war cut adrift by conventional news narratives.”

These remarkable works are from the hand of humanity, to humanity itself. Departed, dispatched, or struggling to survive under imposed “freedom.” From Earlier duplicities in Central America, to Palestine and Blair’s deviant Christianity. A searing compassion and anger shines from these figures. A wake up call which should be the conscience of nations.

For those in, or visiting London, until 7th October, Saint John on Bethnal Green (moments from Bethnal Green Underground.)

*Veteran War Correspondent **Felicity Arbuthnot** is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization and Associate Editor of Global Research*

Notes

<http://www.stjohnonbethnalgreen.org/arts/belfry.html>

<http://www.mayayres.com/>

Barbarity : <http://www.mayayres.com/aggression2-barbarity.html>

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