

## Painted Torture

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Global Research, November 18, 2011

[War Is A Crime](#) 18 November 2011

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [History](#)

You walk into a large, bright gallery full of large colorful portraits, portraits of men. They are fairly ordinary looking men. They could be from Western Asia or the “Middle East.”

You approach one and look at him for an instant. He looks normal, relaxed, almost expressionless, certainly expressing no very strong emotion.

Before you can look long, your eyes are drawn to the curving lines of words swirling around the canvas like leaves in water. You read words like these, twisting your head almost upside down to follow them:

“FROM THE TIME OF MORNING PRAYERS THEY WOULD DRAW A CIRCLE ON THE WALL, AND I HAD TO STAND ON MY TOES TWO HOURS WITH MY NOSE TOUCHING THE CIRCLE.”

You read on as more words flow around this one canvas. You read about dogs and cattle prods and death threats and harm to loved ones, sleep deprivation and confinement in a box and living human beings piled up like suitcases in a truck.

Then you look at all the other men and all the other words all around the gallery.

Then you look at their faces again.

And now you see the sadness, the resignation, the exhaustion, and the misery.

The scars on these torture victims are no more visible than the scars on those who tortured them. But they are made visible by this combination of portraits and painted words.

While former Vice President Dick Cheney canceled his threatened visit to Charlottesville this week, his handiwork came instead. An exhibition of Daniel Heyman’s paintings of Iraqis can be seen in the Ruffin Hall Gallery at the University of Virginia.

Outside the gallery, people go on with their lives, some of them worried about their mortgage, some about their lack of one, some about the celebrity divorce du jour, and others especially concerned about Dick Cheney’s right to speak in public but free of any unpleasant questioning from those who have not yet internalized a culture of obedience and demonization of designated objects of fear.

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