

make art for future generations, and in a way for past generations. Art is a thread that connects people with their past and their future, a kind of time capsule witness that will be opened by generations hence who will marvel and wonder at the times that we are living through.

JM: What was your relationship and interaction with the former prisoners like?

DH: I was listening to interviews being conducted, for the most part, by American lawyers who represent the Iraqi victims in US Federal Court. The interviews are done in a small conference room or large guest room in a hotel, with the Iraqi witness, a translator, a lawyer who ran the interview, another who took notes, and perhaps a third, and myself. At times there was another person, one of the Iraqi men who work for the lawyers in Baghdad. We all sit around a table, the witness on one side, me on the other. Next to the witness is a translator, across from him is the lawyer. I usually manipulate the seating to have a clear view of the former detainee's face straight on, or at least as straight on as possible. This allows me to paint a frontal portrait, so that the picture is really of the witness talking directly to you, the viewer. The lawyer asks a question, it's translated, the Iraqi may answer, that is translated, sentence by sentence, and then the lawyer asks another question. All the time I am painting the portrait and writing the testimony as fast as I can, knowing that my time with each former detainee is limited to the length of the interview, and I never know how long that will be. Sometimes I have time for only one work, sometimes up to three paintings, or prints. After the interviews, the Iraqis are usually very exhausted, having just told us of the most humiliating and horrendous events of their lives. They may be interested in looking at the portraits, they may not. Each is different.

*These eight prints from Daniel Heyman's Amman series from The Abu Ghraib Project are exhibited in conjunction with Dartmouth College's annual Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration and its 2009 theme, "Getting to the Mountaintop: Moving through Conflict toward Reconciliation."*

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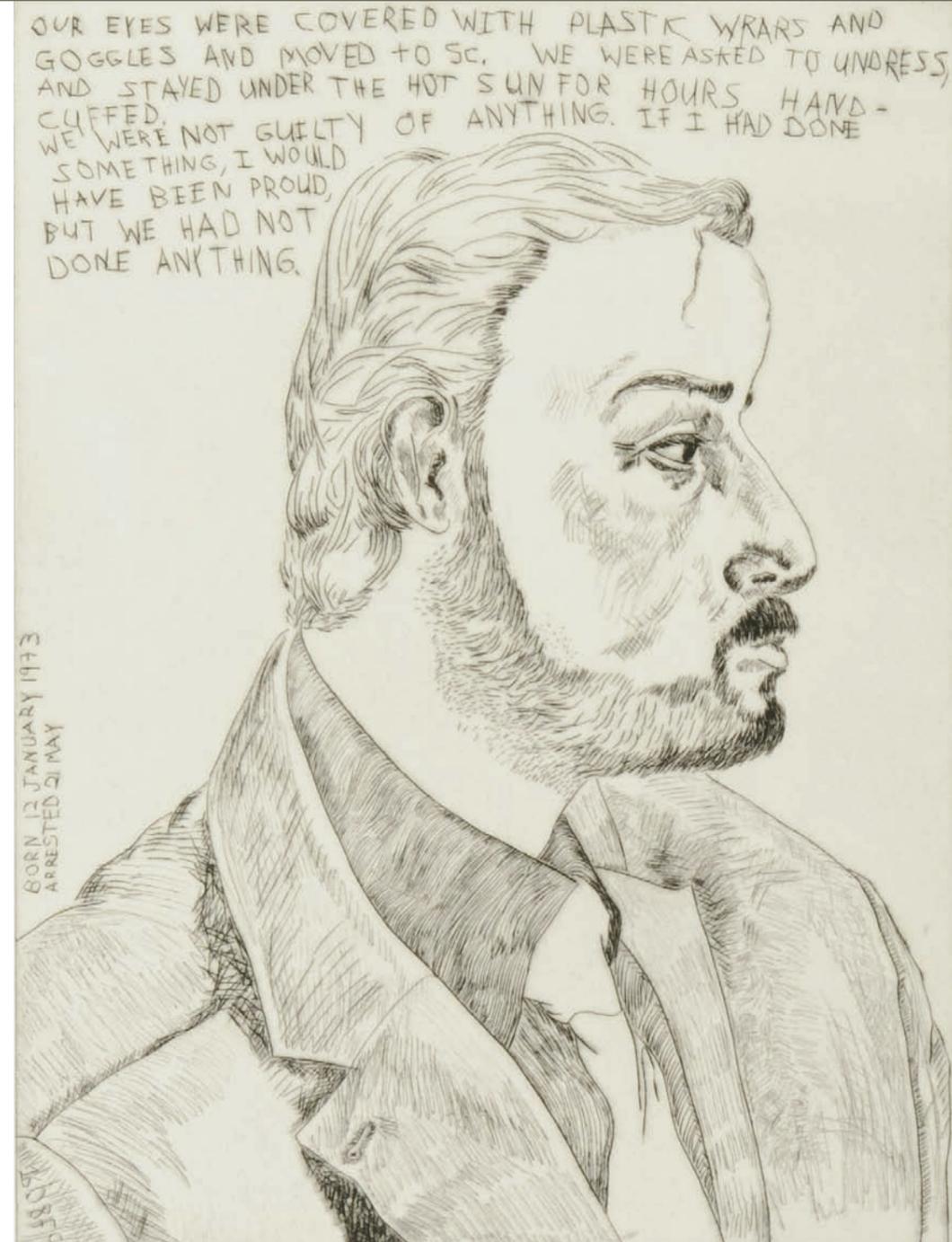
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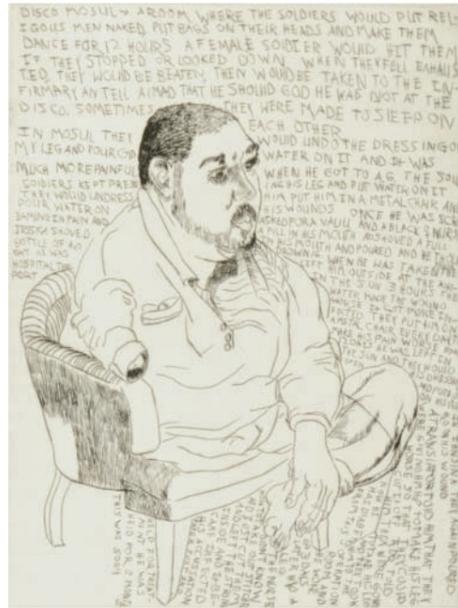
Designed by Christina Nadeau, DPMS



Daniel A. Heyman, *Our Eyes Were Covered*, from the *Amman Series of The Abu Ghraib Project*, March 2006, Drypoint on Rives BFK paper. Purchased through the Anonymous Fund #144; 2007.66.6.

# BEARING WITNESS

*The Abu Ghraib Project* by Daniel Heyman



*Disco Mosul*. Purchased through the Anonymous Fund #144; 2007.66.3.

The photographs taken by soldiers of detainees they abused at Abu Ghraib prison prove the power of the image to transcend meaning, association, and intention. Originally an extension of the physical and mental abuse inflicted upon the prisoners, these photographs were taken to compound the shame of the torture with the threat of showing the photographs to the victim's family and friends. Made public in 2004, the photographs have been widely disseminated through news media and Internet sources, continuing this humiliation of the victims while engraving the images in the minds of

viewers around the world. Without replicating the photographic scenes of torture, Daniel Heyman depicts these prisoners in street clothes, metaphorically removing the hoods from their heads. The prints, made with the consent of the sitters, give each victim a voice and a chance to tell his story.

The soldiers who took the snapshots at Abu Ghraib understood the power of the photographic image. As scholar Mark Reinhardt asserts, "Torture in the prison could, of course, have been carried out without the aid of photography, as it has been on countless other occasions throughout history, but the cameras that were, in this instance,

ubiquitous did not merely record what happened: they were instruments used to abuse and humiliate prisoners" (16). The technologies that allowed for the quick and simple documentation and dissemination of images of abuse—digitization and Internet media—are the same avenues through which the photographs were subsequently distributed. The Internet Age's inundation of images and media saturation strips many viewers of the ability to properly or thoroughly process and react to what we are seeing. As art historian Arthur Danto points out, "When the photographs were released, the moral indignation of the West was focused on the grinning soldiers, for whom this appalling spectacle was a form of entertainment. But the photographs did not bring us closer to the agonies of the victims" (24). Heyman's prints remove the soldiers from the viewable space and place the focus onto the victims and the abuses they endured.

The *Amman* portraits are traditional in their framing of the victim's head and shoulders, with the exception of *Disco Mosul*, which draws back in order to reveal the man's lost limbs. All eight of the men in the portraits avert the gaze of the viewer, with only the sitter in *He Was Happy on That Day* facing directly out of the pictorial plane, though his eyes still avoid any direct contact. Unable to meet these sitters' eyes, the viewer is reminded of the power and politics of looking, and of the prison photographs that should never have been seen (or taken). Text swirls and surrounds each of the sitters, becoming a design element that links together these stylistically variable portraits. In fact, words seem almost to suffocate the figures, intruding upon clothing, curling backward against faces, and ultimately squeezing off of the page.

Heyman's prints reinforce the power of the now iconic photographs from Abu Ghraib by allowing the stories of the victims pictured to be told in their own words. These powerful images interact with the original photographs by drawing upon their ubiquity while informing them with testimony directly from the victims, which was often overlooked by news outlets in the coverage of the prison abuse. By giving a voice to those tortured at Abu Ghraib, Heyman's series serves to ensure that the severe infringements on civil liberties that took place will not be forgotten.

Kristin Monahan Garcia, MALS '05  
Assistant Curator of Academic and Student Programming

## EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST

*John Mathias, a member of the Dartmouth Class of 2011 with an interest in the history of the Middle East, posed questions to Daniel Heyman, Dartmouth Class of 1985, on the subject of his Abu Ghraib portraits. For the full interview, please see [www.hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu](http://www.hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu). For other press responses and further interviews about the series, see [www.danielheyman.com](http://www.danielheyman.com).*

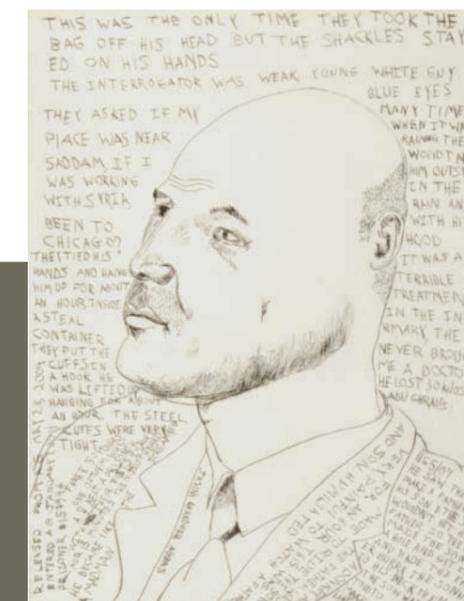
JM: How has your identity as an American been impacted in tackling the content of the *Abu Ghraib Project*?

DH: The question is a strange one, though provocative. I have thought very little of my identity as an American, much the same way that I have thought very little about my identity as a person from New York or a graduate of Dartmouth. These are facts in my life, not identities to be questioned. On the other hand, this project has allowed me to express my "Americanism" with more purpose and thought than before. The America of my mind is a place that respects and supports human rights, that fights secrecy in government, terror in foreign policy, torture in prisons, human rights violations wherever they come into contact with us, and so my helping to uncover what has happened, and may for all we know still be happening, seems to reaffirm my being an American.

JM: How do you hope your work will affect what things will "look like in a year?"

DH: I do not believe that visual art affects policy or action by governments at all. The best one can hope for is that the visitors to my exhibitions become more involved as citizens, seeking answers to questions about the government's real conduct in the war. For me, and for those who have seen the portraits and read the testimony in them, the war now "looks" different, colder, more heart-

less and Kafkaesque than one could have imagined. But I have no fantasy that my pictures have any serious effect on military, judicial, or foreign policy. I believe that artists



*This Was the Only Time They Took the Bag Off*. Purchased through the Anonymous Fund #144; 2007.66.4.