

JEREMY DELLER: IT IS WHAT IT IS

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT IRAQ

Week of October 26–November 1

Tuesday, October 27

10:30 am–1:30 pm, Esam Pasha

Esam Pasha is an artist, journalist, and translator. Born in Iraq, he now lives in the United States. He has worked as an interpreter for the British Embassy in Baghdad and coalition forces in Iraq, including the 101st Airborne and the Florida National Guard as well as for the *Boston Globe* and *Christian Science Monitor*. He was also a freelance journalist for the United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network. A well-known artist in Iraq, Pasha has published articles in art journals and exhibited his artwork in the United States and Europe. In Baghdad in 2003, he completed the first public mural in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq by painting over the largest portrait of the deposed leader and replacing it with depictions of the history of Iraq.

1:30–4:30 pm, Rami Marcus Naissan

Rami Marcus Naissan arrived in the United States in September 2008. Before leaving Iraq, he worked for five years as an interpreter for the US Army. From 2003 through 2008 he served in combat and counterinsurgency operations alongside US military forces during Operation Iraqi Freedom. From 1998 through 2001 Rami served his state-mandated military service as an artilleryist in the Iraq Republican Guard. Now in Chicago, Rami is pursuing his education and works for Catholic Charities, translating among English, Arabic, and Aramaic.

4:30–7:30 pm, Aaron Hughes

Aaron Hughes is an artist and former soldier from Glenview, Illinois. In 2003 he was called from the University of Illinois into active duty in the US Army National Guard. He served as a soldier in Iraq for more than 15 months, after which he returned to the University of Illinois to major in painting. From 2006 to 2007 his artwork was displayed in an exhibition titled *Shifting Memories* at the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum. He is now a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War and is seeking publication for *Dust Memories*, a book that visually documents his time in Iraq.

Wednesday, October 28

10:30 am–1:30 pm, Steve Baskis

Specialist Steve Baskis is a US Army veteran of the Iraq War. He conducted combat operations in Iraq with the 4th Infantry Division until 2008. While serving on personal security detachment for the deputy commanding general of the Multi-National Division-Baghdad that same year, Baskis was blinded when a nearby roadside bomb detonated. He later continued his active-duty at the Blind Rehabilitation Center at the Hines VA Hospital in Maywood, Illinois, where he taught computer classes to other blind patients. As one of the subjects of *Going Blind*, an upcoming documentary intended to increase public awareness about blindness, Baskis discusses his life and challenges, and demonstrates a variety of devices designed to increase independence for the blind. Baskis was recently honored at the Blinded Veteran Association's 63rd Annual National Convention in Phoenix, Arizona.

1:30–4:30 pm, Esam Pasha

See bio from Tuesday, October 27.

Thursday, October 29

10:30 am–1:30 pm, Kathy Kelly

Kathy Kelly is an American peace activist and Co-Coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a group that nonviolently challenges US war-making. Begun in summer 2005, Voices challenged the economic sanctions imposed by the US and United Nations against the Iraqi people between 1990 and 2003. Kelly helped initiate Voices in the Wilderness in 1996 to end the UN/US sanctions against Iraq. Voices in the Wilderness organized 70 delegations to visit Iraq between 1996 and the beginning of the Iraq invasion in March 2003. Kelly and the team stayed in Baghdad throughout the invasion and maintained a household in Baghdad until March 2004. She has traveled to Iraq 24 times since 1996 and has extensive experience living in combat zones.

1:30–4:30 pm, Esam Pasha

See bio from Tuesday, October 27.

Friday, October 30

10:30 am–1:30 pm, Esam Pasha

See bio from Tuesday, October 27.

1:30–4:30 pm, Dr. Donny George Youkhanna

Dr. Donny George Youkhanna is an Iraqi scholar, anthropologist, and author. As the former Director of the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad, he was instrumental in recovering more than half of the 15,000 Mesopotamian artifacts looted from the museum during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. He was forced to flee Iraq in 2006 and is now a visiting professor at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Youkhanna has given several presentations on the current conditions of museums and historical archaeological sites in Iraq, including the 2008 Oriental Institute discussion titled *Looting the Cradle of Civilization: The Loss of History in Iraq*. He is the Chairman and President of the Iraq State Board of Antiquities and Heritage.

Saturday, October 31

10:30–1:30 pm, Waiel Hindo

Waiel Hindo, a native Iraqi, returned to Iraq from May to June 2003 as a member of a humanitarian, reconstruction, and development group. He is currently Treasurer of The American Academic Research Institute in Iraq (TAARII), an organization that promotes scholarly research on and in Iraq. Hindo is also Director of Administration and Finance for the Networking Services and Information Technologies Department at the University of Chicago, and Director of the IT Financial Group. Before moving to the United States in 1970 and becoming a citizen, Hindo worked as Assistant Director for Admissions, Financial Aid, and Public Relations at the American Jesuit University in Baghdad (Al-Hikma).

1:30 am–4:30 pm, Majd

Majd, an Iraqi national who prefers not to publish his last name, is a student with the Iraqi Student Project (ISP). ISP seeks to make undergraduate education possible for qualified students who were studying in Iraq but were unable to complete their education because of the Iraq War and continued violence. Once ISP students have finished their bachelor's degrees in the US, they are committed to returning home to contribute to the rebuilding of Iraq. Majd recently arrived from Baghdad and is a first-year student at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois.

Sunday, November 1

10:30 am–1:30 pm, Phillip O'Connor

From March 2007 to April 2008, Phillip O'Connor served at the US Embassy in Baghdad as an advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity on behalf of the US Army Corps of Engineers. During the regime of Saddam Hussein, electricity was utilized as a political tool, serving those mainly in Baghdad, and after the fall was shut down completely. As an advisor O'Connor played a central role in reorganizing the infrastructure of the Ministry of Electricity. Today the Ministry meets 65% of electrical demand in Iraq, and during 2009 has experienced an increase of 40% in production since 2004. With more than 20 years of experience in the field of energy O'Connor also serves as the President of PROactive Strategies, a Chicago firm providing policy analysis and advice in the regulation of energy and insurance.

1:30–4:30pm, Rami Marcus Naissan

See bio from Tuesday, October 27.

Jeremy Deller: It Is What It Is is part of the Three M Project, a series organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, to commission, organize, and copresent new works of art.

The Three M Project is sponsored by Deutsche Bank.

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Support for the Chicago presentation is generously provided by Susan and Lew Manilow.



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