

Security Measures

Edmund Clark: War of Terror

A NEW PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION AT THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM, LONDON,
EXPLORES THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY ASYMMETRIC WARFARE.

Throughout history, conflicts have been documented, investigated, challenged and responded to by artists. From Goya's searing *Disasters of War* etchings of the Napoleonic Wars to the harrowing and disillusioned First World War works of David Bomberg, Laura Knight's documenting of female experience of the Second World War, and more recently the brutal and confrontational works of Peter Howson produced in Bosnia, artists have managed to create work that both critiques and reflects the political circumstances of the conflicts in context. The work of photographic artist Edmund Clark, who is the subject of a major new exhibition at the Imperial War Museum in London, constitutes just such an undertaking, offering one of the most comprehensive and challenging engagements with the politics and realities of war in the era of the so-called "Global War on Terror." While his research-based photographic and multimedia installation work may not conform to traditional notions of war art, it is an unflinchingly sophisticated intellectual and emotional engagement with the realities of contemporary conflict.

Co-curated by Imperial War Museum's Head of Art, Kathleen Palmer, and Research Curator of Photography, Hilary Roberts, the exhibition follows on from the museum's purchase of 14 prints from Clark's series *Guantanamo: If the Light Goes Out* (2009), their first major purchase of modern photography in 10 years. The series, which is featured in the exhibition, offers the viewer a more complex (but no less chilling) view of Guantanamo than the dehumanised stereotypes that are usually depicted in the media. Showing both the homes of recently released prisoners and the

landscape of the city itself, the images reveal precise and premeditated documentary details, for example that the thickness of a mattress is determined by degree of compliance with the officers' demands. Deeply engaged with systems of control and order, Clark's work offers a more profound and human insight into the experience of men who have been released without charge after years of incarceration, as well as that of the American community living on the US military's oldest overseas naval base.

As this sequence suggests, war has come to mean something radically different in the 21st century and Clark's work continually challenges and renegotiates the terms we use to describe it, making the viewer come to terms with it afresh. As Roberts comments: "Up to and during the Second World War, the definition of war was widely accepted as meaning an open and declared state of conflict between nation states. This interpretation was supported by an international legal infrastructure, which was designed to advocate the proper application of human rights in times of war. In 2010 the Hague Conference published its *Report on the meaning of Armed Conflict in International Law*. This highlights just how much the definition of these hostilities has changed since 1945. The document – motivated by the USA's statement following the attacks of 9/11 that it was involved in a "global war on terror", confirms that the committee considered the term "war" had, in general, been replaced in international law by the much broader concept of "armed conflict."

One of the major ethical issues of today's conflicts posed by Clark's work is the negotiation that takes place concern-







ing privacy and security: for example, the work *Negative Publicity: Artefacts of Extraordinary Rendition* (2015), which looks at the operation and experience of state control and incarceration measures introduced for those suspected of being involved in terrorist-related activities. Now published as a book by Aperture, this work is a collaboration by co-authors Clark and Crofton Black. A significant undertaking, it is made up of photographs and documents that together form a paper trail or hybrid text of material in relation to the unknown number of individuals who were moved to secret prisons between 2001 and 2008 as part of George W. Bush's "War on Terror." Invoices, legal documents, billing forms and other ephemera gathered from businesses are used in an attempt to trace these transfers, which were without legal process or authentication, otherwise known as extraordinary rendition. Using these records is an aesthetic gesture that confronts some of the state control that underpinned the government's activities in this period, and also mirrors some of the techniques used in counter-terrorism activities.

Clark and Black's research is an act of radical recording, giving testament to a state-sanctioned process of vanishing without public record. Their work traces the movements of these individuals as they were sent all over the globe, with many ending up in Guantanamo Bay. Through revealing these hidden secrets of present-day warfare, the exhibition poses powerful and hard-to-ignore questions about the measures taken by states to protect their citizens from the threat of terrorism, and the far-reaching effects of such methods of control. As Palmer explains: "Today, conflict is increasingly asymmetric, with nation states confronting the ever-adapting strategies of non-state networks, often

ideologically motivated. Insurgencies and terrorist attacks have now become the norm. The spectacular intrusions of terror attacks into public spaces have prompted the secret expansion of counter-terrorism activity into homes and hotel rooms, offices, streets, cities and airports.

"The technologies, tactics and theatres of conflict have entirely changed, and the battlefield is no longer a single defined place somewhere far from our shores. Clark's work explores this new range of spaces that combat now inhabits."

Indeed, the installation of his work itself makes use of the technological and theatrical possibilities of today's museum. Creating a multi-sensory environment using video, sound, graphic screens and projections was important to the concept of the exhibition, as Palmer asserts: "Each area of the show offers different combinations and uses of media in its installation. In developing the exhibition with us, Clark has also sought to play with scale and form, mirroring to some extent the disorientation induced by the systems of control his work explores. Viewers will at times feel as though they are entering into the landscapes and environments presented as both the observer and the inhabitant of spaces of control."

For this first major solo showcase of Clark's work in the UK, the curators have focused on British connections. At the heart of this approach is the *Control Order House* (2011) project, which directly addressed restraining measures in the UK. For this piece, Clark stayed for three days and two nights in the house of an individual with a "control order" under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, which gave the government the power to relocate individuals suspected of terrorist offences to houses in different parts of Britain and to impose curfews, control communication and exercise other restraints.

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The forest surrounding Antavilai.
© Edmund Clark. Courtesy of Flowers
Gallery London and New York.

Left:
Entrance to the Libyan intelligence
service detention facility at Tajoura
Tripoli. © Edmund Clark. Courtesy of
Flowers Gallery London and New York.



Swimming pool in the Hotel Gran Meliá Victoria Palma de Mallorca. © Edmund Clark. Courtesy of Flowers Gallery London and New York.

Right:
Corridors connecting cells to
interrogation rooms. © Edmund Clark.
Courtesy of Flowers Gallery London
and New York.

All images from *Negative Publicity:
Artefacts of Extraordinary Rendition*,
by Edmund Clark and Crofton Black.
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Words
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A total of 52 people were subject to these detaining orders between 2005 and 2011. Unsurprisingly, Clark's work itself had to be rigorously approved by the Home Office and the contained person's lawyers whilst also intensively seeking not to identify the individual or their home. This piece is a powerful exploration of Britain's response to the threat of terrorism: asking questions and resisting prejudgements about the implications of such measures.

One of the most subtle and sensitive aspects of Clark's work is his ability to move between the different scales of war in modern society, from the minute and local to the international. His work shows an intricate understanding of the different levels at which security and surveillance operations occur. *Control Order House* focuses on the national policies of the UK, and as Palmer comments, "The nation is only one of a range of power structures which are relevant to conflict today. States increasingly work together for different purposes, in groups of varying types and scales, through institutions and organisations such as the United Nations, Nato, the World Trade Organisation, the G20, the International Criminal Court, regional groups and free trade partnerships, or more temporary coalitions. A number of international corporations today seem more influential than some nation states. Individuals may be members of a wide range of ethnic, social and ideological communities which may be localised or global in spread, or even virtual."

This feature of war is powerfully expressed in the international paper trail of *Negative Publicity: Artefacts of Extraordinary Rendition*, which shows locations in Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Italy, Spain, Libya, Afghanistan and the United States, all of which have been publicly confirmed

as being involved in the rendition process. In contrast to this international focal point is the tender, personal and understated *Letters to Omar* (2010), a selection of cards and letters sent to UK resident Omar Deghayes, whilst detained for six years in Guantanamo military prison.

Before Omar would receive these papers, they would have undergone a rigorous examination and censoring process, with everything scanned for dangerous substances, redacted and copied or scanned. Further control was exerted in terms of when they would be released to Omar by the guards.

What these letters in their deformed and rigorously governed form reveal is the level at which discourses around the "War on Terror" are about communication and control over the individual. It is easy to see how the notion that these documents, having been the product of interference by authorities, would contribute to a sense of unease, paranoia and anxiety for Omar, who was later released from the detention camp without charge in 2007.

Confronting the viewer with a multi-sensory insight into the ethical implications of warfare, the Imperial War Museum's *Edmund Clark: War of Terror* exhibition poses important questions that we should be asking ourselves in an age when the definition of war is changing in light of modern terrorism, cyber-warfare and increasing use of surveillance methods. Rather than offering didactic responses that assert prescribed readings onto their audience, Clark's work is primarily concerned with uncovering hidden narratives, therefore encouraging the viewer to reach their own conclusion. As such, it creatively and dynamically reaches out to the tradition of documentary war art, whilst also depicting a conceptually radical and critically engaged exploration of our society.

