

NAILYA ALEXANDER GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

IRAQ: Scars and Exile

Photographs by LORI GRINKER

January 9 - February 16, 2008

Opening Reception: January 15, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Panel Discussion: February 5th, 7:00 pm at Fordham University Lincoln Center

“The war in Iraq has killed hundreds of thousands, and caused the one of the greatest flights of people in the history of the Middle East. Sixty thousand people flee their homes each month. But when they are reported on at all, they are seldom individualized. Rather than photographing hundreds of Iraqi refugees to illustrate the epic size of the exodus, I want to follow, for an extended period and in an intimate way, just a few - I want to take the journey with them, to live the aftermath of war with them, and to relate their experiences as if it were happening to me, to understand the experiences that drove them into exile, where they are often viewed with suspicion and even as the enemy.”

– Lori Grinker

Nailya Alexander Gallery is proud to present “Iraq: Scars and Exile,” a photographic journey by Lori Grinker that captures the physical and emotional wounds inflicted upon a cross section of individual Iraqis and families by the ongoing war in Iraq.

Fifteen large-scale color photographs of Iraqi refugees depicting their sojourn in Amman, Jordan, were selected for this exhibition, the first chapter of Lori Grinker’s mission to document the continuing saga of their lives in exile. An eight-minute multimedia presentation composed of interviews with her subjects conveys their stories through their words and gestures – steps to bridge the gap between their personal and private trauma and the overwhelming public denial, both here in the United States and abroad, of their situation.

When the war in Iraq began in 2003, Lori Grinker was embedded on the USNS Comfort Naval hospital ship where both wounded American soldiers and Iraqi civilians were treated for combat

24 W 57TH ST #503 NEW YORK NY 10019 212.315.2211 F 212.315.2220

NAILYA@MINDSPRING.COM NAILYAALEXANDERGALLERY.COM

related injuries. At the same time she was completing a 15-year project, photographing veterans of war from thirty countries—both the victors and the vanquished. This project resulted in a book, *AFTERWAR: Veterans From A World In Conflict*, published in 2005, with a traveling exhibition. Both projects led her to begin documenting the plight of Iraqi refugees. While Grinker had heard about Iraqi civilians fleeing the war, she had seen little photo documentation of their plight; with sponsorship from the Open Society Institute she was able to begin documenting their stories. Simultaneously, she was in the process of developing another project, with writer Paul McEnroe for the Dart Society on healing and trauma. Both roads led her to Amman, to meet with Medicins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders), working out of the Red Crescent Hospital in Amman treating Iraqi wounded. In April, and again in September 2007, she traveled to Amman to photograph Iraqis forced to leave their families, homes and livelihoods for a life of cramped, substandard living conditions, inactivity, and waiting for the time when it will be safe to return to Iraq, or hear that they have found sanctuary in another country. And those are the “lucky” ones. Many of her subjects are in Amman to repair their bodies, only to be repatriated to a war zone after they are “healed.”

The exhibition will be accompanied by a panel discussion on the effects of the war on Iraqi citizens who have fled their homes. Journalists and artists are aware of the strong influence their work can have in raising public awareness of humanitarian issues, contributing, for example, to change public opinion of the American involvement in the Vietnam War. This discussion will address the questions of what are appropriate relationships between human rights advocacy, policy change, and the visual arts in the context of the war in Iraq War, and how can artists and advocates work together to raise awareness and bring change? The panel discussion *Iraqi Citizens: War And Exile* will be held on February 5, 2008 at 7:00 pm at Fordham University Lincoln Center, 113rd West 60th Street (at Columbus). Further details will be announced.

Note: The Gallery will donate 10% of all print sales to Human Rights First. For up-to-date information on the crisis visit <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/refugees/index.asp>

About Lori Grinker:

Lori Grinker began her career while a student at Parsons School of Design, documenting the rise of 13-year old future heavyweight championship boxer Mike Tyson. She joined Contact Press Images in 1988. Since then, in addition to her reportage of events such as the destruction of the World Trade Center, she has delved into long-term book projects including *The Invisible Thread: A Portrait of Jewish American Women* (co-author, Jewish Publication Society), and most recently, *Afterwar: Veterans from a World in Conflict* (de.MO 2005), her 15-year project on veterans of the last century. Published and exhibited worldwide, her work has earned international recognition, garnering a World Press Photo Foundation Prize, a W. Eugene Smith Memorial Fund Fellowship, The Ernst Hass Grant, and a Hasselblad Foundation Grant, among others. Her photographs are in many private and public collections including: The International Center of Photography (ICP), The Jewish Museum in New York City, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Based in New York City, she is on the faculty of the ICP.

Q & A with Lori Grinker about Iraq: Scars and Exile

- Of all the Iraqi refugees you've met and images you've taken, which ones have impacted you the most?

There are so many... A 7-year-old in Amman brushes his hair in the mirror and sees only half a face reflected back. An Iraqi father of two, wounded while working as a translator for the Americans now in New York City struggles to start life anew. A large, extended family lives illegally in Amman, running out of time and money. A teenager arrives in Amman, a smile on his face, a baseball cap hide the fact that he has no ears, with a video camera on his shoulder he looks like a tourist, only he is here to endure several surgeries to fix his burned hands. They have equal impact in the long run but the first few days after meeting the 7-year-old, it was his face that stayed with me when I closed my eyes to sleep at night.

- After photographing veterans of war for years, what drove you to begin yet another personal fight against war?

It's the scale...and the impact. According UN statistics, over 4 million Iraqis have fled their homes - 500,000-750,000 are in Jordan, an estimated 1.4 million are in Syria, 70,000 are in Egypt, and 200,000 are in the Gulf Region. These are some of the people the U.S. government went in to free from the rule of

Saddam Hussein. Among them are people who helped the U.S. with their mission, and many were happy to receive the U.S. forces in 2003. I want the world, especially Americans, to know that we've abandoned them. By sharing their post-war experiences as they become residents of other countries, struggle to make ends meet as refugees, or find new ways to live with the wounds of war, viewers can learn about the true cost of war, its effects on a population, and come to understand more about their own relationship to conflict. Most Americans are unaware of what life has become for so many Iraqis. We see stories about US soldiers. We get daily reports about suicide bombs. We read accounts of civilian casualties. But we don't see Iraqi survivors, the hard working, family-oriented people — doctors, carpenters, engineers, teachers, homemakers, students—that the American government invaded Iraq to set free and have broken our promise to protect.

- If there is a message you wish to relay in this exhibition, in addition to the folly of war, what would that be?

This has become one of the largest refugee crises in Middle East history but it's difficult to fathom since these people are not refugees in tented camps, waiting in line to get aid from the UN organizations. In fiscal year 2007, only 1,608 of a promised 7,000 refugees were admitted into the U.S. The U. S. Government has now set a goal of bringing in 12,000 Iraqi refugees in fiscal year 2008, with an additional 5,000 visas to be granted among the more than 100,000 Iraqis employed by the U.S. or U.S. Government contractors. This plan passed Congress, but as of this writing (12/20/07), has not yet been signed into law. The relocation of 12,000 Iraqis by the end of September 2008 is a start, but certainly not a solution. Millions of lives are at risk, and I would like to tell the stories of just a few...