

The WASHINGTON SPECTATOR



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If you are in New York City this Easter weekend, and you have time for one mesmerizing gallery show, head over to the famed Chelsea district and the Gasser Grunert Gallery at 524 West 19th Street where the Engines of War photography exhibition opened this week. The show blends the genius of social documentary photographer Eugene Richards (whose emotion-packed studies of veterans returning home from Iraq provide an indelible epitaph on that godforsaken chapter) with the formalism of Heather Ainsworth (her elegant, color saturated portraits of Remotely Piloted Aircraft (drones) at rest in their hangers at Hancock Field in Syracuse, New York convey a supple, sensuous beauty that accompanies the power to destruct). The show includes portraits by Jamel Shabazz that capture the dignity and pride of men and women in the armed forces, and six gems from Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Anthony Suau that record the everyday presence of the Iraq War in our culture and our institutions – "Our Prayers Are With The Troops, Try Our Fresh Tender Home Cooked Turtle" (from a nite-lit sign at the J&L Vintage Café). Conflict photographer Ben Lowy's scenes of Iraqi street life seen through the window frame of a troop carrier or heavily armored vehicle reinforce the notion of "embedded" and explore critical issues of cultural distance and separation between the photographer and his subject. Christopher Morris is represented by three images of cadets at West Point who are photographed as they are watching President Obama lay out his war strategy for Afghanistan in a televised speech. Iraqi street photographer Ghaith Abdul-Ahad provides the lone graphic inventory of human carnage, and although shocking, unvarnished and horrifyingly realistic, the viewer is unable to look away. A lustrous image by Dutch photographer Teun Voten of a Chinook helicopter transporting a Humvee against the late afternoon Afghan sun, artifacts of war machinery portrayed without irony in the manner of an entry in a fine art sculpture catalogue by British photographer Lisa Bernard, and a gorgeous nighttime composition of the interior of a giant transport aircraft retrofitted as a surgery theater by British multi-media artist David Cotterrell round out this majestic show. The distinctive signature style that defines the work of each of these superlative photographers somehow connects them at the same time to the themes of the show and the work of their assembled colleagues, a testimony to the curatorial talents of Dallas-based Charles Dee Mitchell and Cynthia Mulcahy who put this show together.