

May 14 – June 18, 2016

STEVE MUMFORD

Recent Paintings



In his latest paintings **Steve Mumford** continues to elaborate on his long-time involvement with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, following and yet subverting the 19th century model of a history painter.

During his numerous stints between 2003 and 2013 to both war zones as well as army hospitals and the Guantanamo prison complex, he acted in the tradition of the war artist making hundreds of

drawings on the spot, 'bearing witness', to the war and its consequences, as documented on artnet.com and in the pages of Harper's Magazine.

Mumford synthesizes experiences and observations from his trips in the works in this exhibition; the oil paintings, ranging from monumental to intimate, invoke both specific and universal aspects of war. Instead of representing momentous historical events, the usual victor's narrative typical of the genre, he focuses on the personal: moments of silence, pause, private drama, the 'other side' of the war.

In the gigantic *Camp X-Ray, Guantanamo*, the artist expands on his drawings done on the spot in 2013 at the former site of 'enhanced' interrogations. Denied access to the actual prisoners, he immerses the viewer in a landscape both beautiful and grim, a landscape of pain grown over by indifferent tropical vegetation.

In *Female Barracks, Samara*, Mumford focuses on a group of female soldiers at rest in their improvised plywood barracks, barely keeping out the heat of the midday sun. A young conscript cleans her weapon as her officer daydreams languidly in the foreground. The painting

affectionately invokes 19th century harem scenes as much as the camaraderie of a platoon.

In *The Prayer*, Mumford pays tribute to the Renaissance tradition of portraying saints in the wilderness: a lone US soldier experiences a moment of spiritual contemplation or redemption in another indifferent landscape: a car, riddled with bullets sits by the berms and Hesco barriers meant to protect soldiers from an insurgent attack. A pair of helicopters track the horizon on some unknown mission; the sleepy life of the plains beyond the base, manifested in a shepherd with his flock, continues as it has for thousands of years.

In *Anbar*, a group of passengers are tightly clustered in a the open cockpit of a Blackhawk helicopter as it speeds low over the rural Iraqi terrain; a farmer looks up as the aircraft roars past, while the four passengers, lost in thought, contemplate their own disparate missions.

Through his new paintings Mumford suggests that all wars are similar, all ambitions of empire bedeviled from the start, yet rife with moments of common humanity magnified by the stresses of combat.



Since 2003 Steve Mumford (b. 1960, Boston) has been traveling to conflict ridden areas of Iraq and Afghanistan and most recently to Guantanamo, Cuba. He studied at Boston Museum School (BFA) and the School of Visual Arts (MFA) in New York City. Mumford's works have been the subject of solo exhibitions mounted at Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, TN; Pritzker Military Academy Library, Chicago, IL; University of Akron, Ohio; Cranbrook Art Museum, MI; The Moore Space, Miami, FL; Tufts University Art Gallery, MA; Meadows Museum, Dallas, TX, and ACA Gallery of Savannah College of Art and Design, Atlanta, GA. Mumford has taught at the Cooper Union School of Art, The School of Visual Arts, Montclair State University and the NY Academy of Art.