



Bidoun

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REVIEWS: New York

'Image War: Contesting Images of Political Conflict'
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By Murtaza Vali [excerpt]

After the first Gulf War, the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard notoriously asserted that the conflict hadn't really happened. The carefully filtered and packaged set of media images that emerged from that war and circulated, constituted a sanitized simulacrum of the conflict, emphasizing the spectacle of US military technology rather than the devastating human toll of war. The result was a war experienced by most of us as, literally, an "image war," an unrelenting nonstop feed of images that became banal and lulled viewers into an apathetic stupor. In the intervening years, the stakes have risen dramatically, as increasingly sophisticated digital technology has transformed the media, making it easier and faster to capture, process, distribute, and consume information. 'Image War: Contesting Images of Political Conflict,' organized by the 2005-2006 curatorial fellows of the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program, brings together recent work, in various media, that reflects on the contested status and complex circulation patterns of images of conflict and violence, both historical and recent, in the contemporary digital mediascape.

Joy Garnett's *Kill Box* (2001) recreates in paint one of the high-tech visual representations that defined the first Gulf War: palette and smear are carefully manipulated to approximate the surreal color and digital blur of night vision and remote targeting technologies. Painting's unique qualities of surface and gesture allow a human element to enter a cold and remote digital image of destruction.