

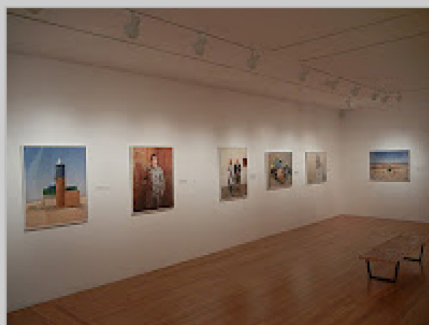
# DLK COLLECTION

From one photography collector to another: a venue for thoughtful discussion of vintage and contemporary photography via reviews of recent museum exhibitions, gallery shows, photography auctions, photo books, art fairs and other items of sometime interest to photography collectors large and small.

Friday, January 27, 2012

## ➔ Claire Beckett, Simulating Iraq @Wadsworth Atheneum

**JTF (just the facts):** A total of 18 large scale color photographs, framed in white and unmatted, and hung in a single room gallery space on the first floor of the museum. All of the prints are archival inkjet prints, sized 40x30 or reverse. The images were taken in 2008 and 2009. (Installation shots at right.)



**Comments/Context:** Claire Beckett's recent photographs turn on the idea of upending our expectations. Taken at specialized military training sites around the US, her smart, sometimes dissonant images document artificial, stage set versions of Iraq and Afghanistan, staffed with "soldiers" and "civilians" and used for simulations and training exercises. Nearly every picture is an inversion or a breakdown of reality as we know it, each one undermining our ability to impose our now ingrained stereotypes.

Her images of these fabricated towns look plausibly real from far away, but up close, the makeshift mosques are made of rough plywood and the warrens of interlocking alleys and buildings are cinderblocks painted the color of sand. Simplistic forms and fake brickwork provide an illusory backdrop for small narratives and role playing exercises played



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out by the soldiers: Al-Qaeda terrorist cells making IEDs, Taliban fighters hoarding machine guns, nurses and injured marines, and unsuspecting locals and civilians drinking tea in the village square. Beckett's portraits of these "actors" have an even more surreal quality. Marines and locals from nearby American towns dress up in tunics, robes and headscarves and are given Iraqi or Afghani names and elaborate backstories, but their blue eyes, fair skin, and work boots provide incongruous cultural mixtures and contrasts. Fresh makeup and perfect nails adorn a young "Iraqi nurse" and fake carcasses hang from a "butcher shop". Everything is a visual approximation, a window-dressed stand-in for the real.

I like the fact that these pictures are free from a specific point of view; they aren't slanted or pushing a particular agenda. Their matter-of-fact conceptual oddity is part of what makes them so successful - they are open for any number of complex interpretations or conclusions. Beckett's photographs capture a different side of these conflicts than we have seen previously, broadening the ultimate story of our approach to these long running wars.

**Collector's POV:** Since this is a museum exhibition, there are, of course, no posted prices. Beckett's photography has no secondary market history, so gallery retail is likely the only viable option for interested collectors at this point. She is represented in Boston by Carroll and Sons ([here](#)).

**Rating:** \* (one star) GOOD (rating system described [here](#))

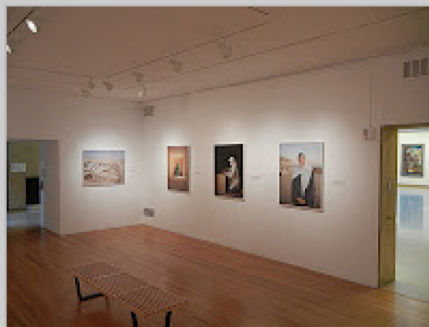
#### Transit Hub:

- Artist site ([here](#))
- Interview: Big, Red & Shiny ([here](#))

#### Claire Beckett, Simulating Iraq

Matrix 163

Through March 4th



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