

Al-Mutanabbi Street's bombed car: Museum display shows impact of modern war

ITM correspondent

When Iraqi artist Maysaloun Faraj said that the salvation of her country lay in the hands of artists she probably never envisaged that a car used in a suicide bombing attack would become a major exhibit at the Imperial War Museum in London.



At 11.45am on Monday 5 March 2007, a suicide bomber blew up a car on Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad. The bombing killed 38 people and wounded more than 100. No one has ever claimed

responsibility for the attack.

The bombing was an attack on Baghdad's cultural life. Al-Mutanabbi Street was home to a historic book market and has been the cultural heart of Baghdad for

centuries.

The Imperial War Museum North in Manchester is presenting the car destroyed in the bombing of Baghdad's Al-Mutanabbi Street. Turner Prize winning British artist Jeremy Deller has helped the Museum acquire the car.

Jeremy Deller said: 'It's unusual to see anything from the conflict in Iraq 'in life' so I was interested in being able to show this car to the public, initially in the US and now the UK. I'm very happy that the Imperial War Museum has taken this object into its collections and is putting it on such prominent

display – I couldn't think of a better home for it in this country.'

This major new acquisition serves as evidence of the impact of modern war on civilians.

The car is now being presented to audiences in the north of England for the first time and is part of the Museum's permanent collection. Deller has previously toured the car around the USA to provoke debate, under the banner It Is What It Is. It was also on temporary display at Imperial War Museum London.

At 1pm and 4pm each day, the car





will be engulfed by the museum's 360 degree Big Picture Show; a unique and immersive cinema style experience. Al-Mutanabbi Street, a powerful new short feature inspired by the car will be projected onto each of the 27 foot walls in the Museum's Main Exhibition Space, providing a sense of time, place and atmosphere to the Al-Mutanabbi Street attack.

It will be the first time the award winning Big Picture Show has

incorporated moving imagery as well as photographs since the Museum opened in 2002. The new show is an artistic response to bombing created through the work of a Manchester playwright. It conveys how the conflict has impacted on Iraqi people while also instilling them with a sense of resilience and survival.

The bombing will also be marked across Manchester from April to June. Imperial War Museum North

is working with John Rylands Library, who will display an exhibition of Broadsides created by The Al-Mutanabbi Street Coalition. The posters have toured the world in an effort to raise awareness of the bombing and will now come to the Manchester to coincide with the installation at Imperial War Museum North.

The Museum is also taking part in an international event. Films created by students of the Independent Film and Television College, Baghdad, will be screened at the Museum in May on dates that coincide with similar showings

taking place in Iraq.

Jim Forrester, Imperial War Museum North Director, said: 'The wreckage of a car caught up in a street bomb is an example of the one of the many faces of modern war, where civilians are now often seen as a frontline target. This powerful exhibit reminds us just how dramatically war shapes people's lives.'

Writing in the Guardian Jonathan Jones noted: What immediately strikes you is the information this car brings, the terrible moment of reality. It is a piece of evidence;





here is something solid, actual, to replace the strange abstraction of nightmare news stories from remote places. The object is horribly disturbing, really gut-churning, because its fire-reddened, inside-out, flattened metal corpse makes you think unavoidably of human bodies. Here is the effect of pressure and heat on metal – it communicates, with unforced truth, the scale of violence unleashed by the invasion of Iraq. It is not rhetoric but reportage. Anyone is entitled to interpret what it means – the opinion of Tony Blair would be as valid as yours or mine. It is a historical document, dragged from

hell for us to contemplate in the calm of a museum.

Diane Lees, Director-General of the Imperial War Museum says: 'It's a privilege to work with an artist like Jeremy Deller and we are incredibly grateful for the insight and effort he's invested in the acquisition and installation of this remarkable exhibit for the Imperial War Museum. We hope Baghdad, 5 March 2007 will prove a thought-provoking addition to our permanent Collections and encourage visitors to consider not just this car, but all our exhibits, in a new light.'