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MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

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Exhibition Review: Light in Wartime

By Labanya Maitra

Seba Kurtis, *Untitled 5* from the series *Heartbeat*, 2012, Lambda print, 18.5 x 23.5

There's something haunting about how beautiful war can be. A millennia of legends and history later, the saying still remains: the most beautiful things are often the most dangerous. And such is the story of the images mounted on the white walls of apexart – the Light in Wartime exhibition.

Organized by Rola Khayyat, *Light in Wartime* is on display this summer from June 7th to July 28th. Featuring photographs by the likes of Vartan Avakian, Ziyah Gafic, Rula Halawani, An-My Lê, and Jo Ractliffe, among others, the exhibition is a clockwise narrative of war around a yellow-lit studio space.
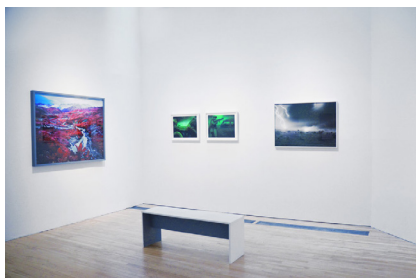
Installation view, Courtesy of apexart

Light in Wartime tries to explore a photograph as an entity separate from the objective truth, blurring the lines between documentary and art. Each photographer and each photograph brings a unique perspective to the idea of war and how we've been accustomed to consuming it. Far from news photos of soldiers, blood and gore, the photographs aren't mirroring the conflict. Rather, they are a window to the mind of the artist who's framing them.
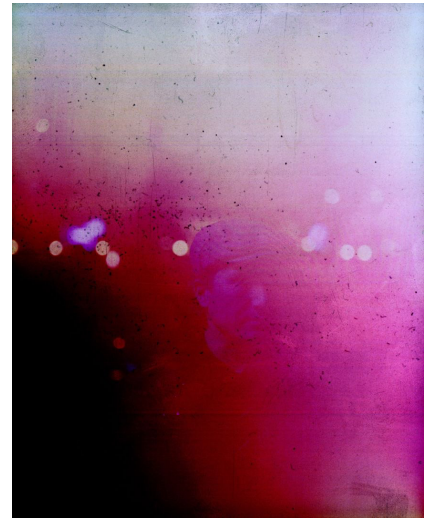

Seba Kurtis, *Untitled 9* from the series *Heartbeat*, 2012, Lambda print, 18.5 x 23.5

The first image to the left looks almost like a neon light bokeh from a distance but upon a closer look, you can make out the faint image of a man in the center of the frame. Seba Kurtis uses this technique in the images displayed from his series Heartbeat. His images weave portraits of migrants in detention centers in the UK together with the images produced by machines put in place to detect these migrants, like heartbeat detectors.

Richard Mosse, *Commodius Vicus*, 2015, Digital C-print, 40 x 50 in

The largest print in the exhibition, Richard Mosse's *Commodius Vicus* reminds one of a center-piece of a decorated counter-top, but tucked away in the corner. The first thing you notice is the bright, vibrant red; in the foreground, in the background, everywhere. Mosse uses infrared film to document the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. His images don't show the war, they don't show anything but the stunning landscape – but the idea is to make this unseen conflict visible. The red is an eerie reminder of the bloodshed, while the green river of camouflage colors.
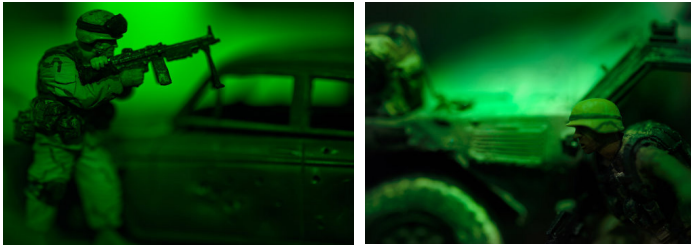
David Levinthal, *Untitled from the series I.E.D.*, 2008, Archival pigment print, 17 x 22 in

Nilu Izadi, *Yellow House*, 2010, Camera obscura digital C-print, 21 x 17 in

Even though each photograph is completely different from the next, they all have one thing in common – they never show war in a way we'd expect to see it. The exhibition is designed to end with Allan deSouza's *Cluster*, a group of four photographs aligned in a grid. Each image is composed by melding together four different images: the sun, the earth, a bomb explosion and the retina, and each element shines through in one of the photos.

Cluster leaves you feeling as if you don't really understand what's going on while at the same time, it all makes perfect sense; a theme that runs true throughout the experience.

Every photographer uses a different technique to show the war, but not really show it. David Levinthal shows the Iraq and Afghanistan wars with toy soldiers in fatigues staged against the neon-green glow of night vision cameras. An untitled image from Sebastian Tomada Piccolomini's *The Things They Carry*, shows high-contrast portraits of a Syrian rebel in a basement in Aleppo holding a pack of cigarettes – the thing most important to him. Nilu Izadi, on the other hand, uses a sniper hole in one of Beirut's Barakat rooms to create a camera obscura installation.
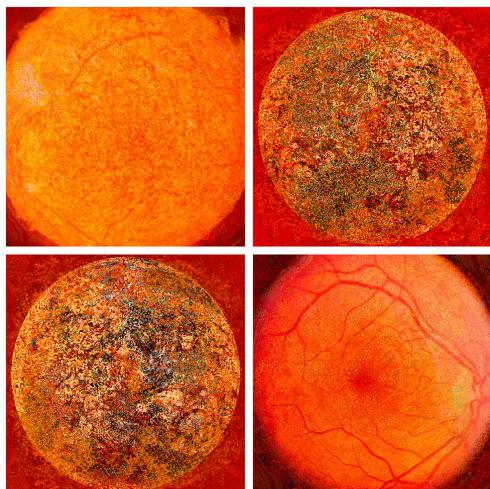
Allan deSouza, *Cluster*, 2009, Digital C-prints, 22 x 22 in (each),
Courtesy of the Artist and Talwar Gallery, New York | New Delhi