A Space for Dialogue, founded with support from the Class of 1948, is made possible with generous endowments from the Class of 1967 and the Bonnie and Richard Reiss Jr. ’66 Education Access Fund.

These eight prints from Daniel Heyman’s Amman series from The Abu Ghraib Project are exhibited in conjunction with Dartmouth College’s annual Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration and its 2009 theme, “Getting to the Mountaintop: Moving through Conflict toward Reconciliation.”
Disco Mosul, purchased through the Anonymous Fund #144; 2007.66.3.

asserts, “Torture in the prison could, of course, have been carried out with the consent of the sitters, give each victim a voice and a chance to metaphorically removing the hoods from their heads. The prints, made of torture, Daniel Heyman depicts these prisoners in street clothes, viewers around the world. Without replicating the photographic scenes of torture, Daniel Heyman depicts these prisoners in street clothes, metaphorically removing the hoods from their heads. The prints, made with the consent of the sitters, give each victim a voice and a chance to tell his story.

The soldiers who took the snapshots at Abu Ghraib understood the power of the photographic image. As scholar Mark Reinhardt asserts, “Torture in the prison could, of course, have been carried out without the aid of photography, as it has been on countless other occasions throughout history, but the cameras that were, in this instance, ubiquitous did not merely record what happened: they were instruments used to abuse and humiliate prisoners” (16). The technologies that allowed for the quick and simple documentation and dissemination of images of abuse—digitization and Internet media—are the same avenues through which the photographs were subsequently distributed. The Internet Age’s inundation of images and media saturation strips many viewers of the ability to properly or thoroughly process and react to what we are seeing. As art historian Arthur Danto points out, “When the photographs were released, the moral indignation of the West was focused on the grinning soldiers, for whom this appalling spectacle was a form of entertainment. But the photographs did not bring us closer to the agonies of the victims” (24). Heyman’s prints remove the soldiers from the viewable space and place the focus onto the victims and the abuses they endured.

The Anaman portraits are traditional in their framing of the victim’s head and shoulders, with the exception of Disco Mosul, which draws back in order to reveal the man’s lost limbs. All eight of the men in the portraits avert the gaze of the viewer, with only the sitter in He Was Happy on That Day facing directly out of the pictorial plane, though his eyes still avoid any direct contact. Unable to meet these sitters’ eyes, the viewer is reminded of the power and politics of looking, and of the prison photographs that should never have been seen (or taken). Text swirls and surrounds each of the sitters, becoming a design element that links together these stylistically variable portraits. In fact, words seem almost to suffocate the figures, intruding upon clothing, curling backward against faces, and ultimately squeezing off of the page.

Heyman’s prints reinforce the power of the now iconic photographs from Abu Ghraib by allowing the stories of the victims pictured to be told in their own words. These powerful images interact with the original photographs by drawing upon their ubiquity while informing them with testimony directly from the victims, which was often overlooked by news outlets in the coverage of the prison abuse. By giving a voice to those tortured at Abu Ghraib, Heyman’s series serves to ensure that the severe infringements on civil liberties that took place will not be forgotten.

Kristin Monahan Garcia, MALS ’05
Assistant Curator of Academic and Student Programming

John Mathias, a member of the Dartmouth Class of 2011 with an interest in the history of the Middle East, posed questions to Daniel Heyman, Dartmouth Class of 1985, on the subject of his Abu Ghraib portraits. For the full interview, please see www.woodmuseum.dartmouth.edu. For other press responses and further interviews about the series, see www.danielheyman.com.

JM: How has your identity as an American been impacted in tackling the content of the Abu Ghraib Project?

DH: The question is a strange one, though provocative. I have thought very little of my identity as an American, much the same way that I have thought very little about my identity as a person from New York or a graduate of Dartmouth. These are facts in my life, not identities to be questioned. On the other hand, this project has allowed me to express my “Americanism” with more purpose and thought than before. The America of my mind is a place that respects and supports human rights, that fights secrecy in government, terror in foreign policy, torture in prisons, human rights violations wherever they come into contact with us, and so my helping to uncover what has happened, and may for all we know still be happening, seems to reaffirm my being an American.

JM: How do you hope your work will affect what things will “look like in a year?”

DH: I do not believe that visual art affects policy or action by governments at all. The best one can hope for is that the visitors to my exhibitions become more involved as citizens, seeking answers to questions about the government’s real conduct in the war. For me, and for those who have seen the portraits and read the testimony in them, the war now “looks” different, colder, more heartless and Kafkaesque than one could have imagined. But I have no fantasy that my pictures have any serious effect on military, judicial, or foreign policy. I believe that artists