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Instead, Heyman channeled his anger over the Iraq war into something far more ambitious. In the fall of 2006, Heyman traveled to Jordan and Turkey as part of a fact-finding mission led by Susan Burke, an American human-rights lawyer investigating claims of beatings and other abuses by U.S. troops and military contractors in Iraq.

While Burke conducted interviews, Heyman made portraits of about of over fifty former Iraqi detainees, many of whom had been beaten and tortured in prison without ever being charged with a crime. He also transcribed parts of their testimony directly on to the portraits.

“As you can imagine, it was some pretty tough stuff,” Heyman recalls. “One man talked about being put in a cage for a week. Another man was hung by his hands until his arms dislocated. Another man was told that he would be raped by the prison guards. Given what these people had been through, it was amazing they could even talk about it.”

On Friday, a selection of portraits Heyman made during his Istanbul trip will go on display at the David Winton Bell Gallery at Brown University. Coinciding with the 10th anniversary of the start of the war, the show will also feature another series of Iraq-inspired portraits by Heyman, as well as work by the Iraqi-American artists Wafaa Bilal.

Also Friday, Brown is hosting a symposium exploring artists’ responses to the war. Titled “Art and War in Iraq,” the event will take place from noon to 5:30 p.u. in the List Art Center Auditorium, 64 College St. in Providence. (For more on teh symposium, visit artandwariniraq.eventbrite.com.)

“Initially, the idea was just to show Daniel’s and Wafaa’s work together,” says Bell gallery director Jo-Ann Conklin. “The fact that it was the war’s 10th anniversary really didn’t enter into it. Still, the timing really couldn’t be any better. If you’ve been following the news recently it’s clear that the Iraq war is still a hot-button issue, at least in some quarters.”

Certainly Heyman can attest to that. During a recent talk at Penn State University, he says he was peppered with questions from students - not just about the social and political consequences of the war but about the role of art and artists during wartime.

“Almost every time I show the Iraq work, I get the same response,” Heyman says. “First, there’s a moment of silence as they absorb what happened to these people - how they were rounded up and thrown in prison, often without evidence; howe they were beaten and tortured, and finally how they were often just let go without warning or explanation.”

Then come the questions Where are these people now? What happened to them? Where any court cases ever filed on their behalf? How did Heyman feel as he listened to their stories?

The more they think about, the more questions they have,” Heyman says.

In retrospect, such responses also vindicate Heyman's decision to shy away from high-profile images such as the notorious photographs from Abu Ghraib. By creating sympathetic portraits of former Iraqi detainees - and by incorporating parts of their personal stories into the portraits - Heyman was able to give the horrors of the Iraq war an intimate, human face.

In addition to the portraits of former Iraqi detainees, the Brown show will feature another of Heyman's portrait series - this one based on a notorious incident involving the U.S. Military contractor Blackwater USA. In 2007, a convoy of Blackwater employees opened fire on Iraqi civilians, killing 11. The contractors claimed they had been fired on. But investigations by both the Iraqi government and the U.S. military disputed those claims.

About a year after the incident Heyman met with several survivors of what became know as the Nisoor Square Massacre. What he heard left him deeply shaken.

"Compared to the interviews with the detainees, the interviews with the Nisoor Square survivors were much more emotional," he says. "Even though the incident had taken place several months earlier, it was still a very tense, very raw situation."

At Brown, the two portrait series will share a common title: "I am Sorry It is Difficult to Start." It's a phrase Heyman borrowed from one of his interviews.

"It comes directly from one of the interviews," he says. "It was just so typical of the way the Iraqis conducted themselves - almost as though they were embarrassed that these terrible things had happened to them."

Daniel Heyman's "I am Sorry It is Difficult to Start" runs through May 26 at the David Winton Bell Gallery, 64 College Street in Providence.

