

Here: Sadiq Mahdy, shown with his family, moved to Baghdad to join relatives after the 1991 Gulf War. Below: Grave-diggers walking to a burial site in Falluja.



JASSIM MOHAMMAD (2)

Light of Day

How a small community arts group used photography to open a window on the real life of Iraqi citizens. **By Marvin Good**



Two years have passed since America invaded Iraq, yet it's still hard to get from our mainstream media a true picture of life in that bomb-plagued nation. The limitations placed on photojournalists by the American military have combined with the extraordinary danger to foreign correspondents who venture beyond the Green Zone to cloud, if not obscure, our sense of what it's like to be a citizen in post-Saddam Iraq.

The Daylight Community Arts Foundation,

a fledgling group dedicated to "exploring new techniques in representation," chose to do something about that information gap. Their plan dealt brilliantly with a lack of resources: Working with several correspondents stationed in Iraq, they distributed single-use cameras, each pre-loaded with a roll of film, to a group of ordinary citizens representing a broad cross section of the population. After these unlikely Iraqi documentarians—a barber, a dentist, and students

among them—finished their shooting, they turned in their cameras to their press contacts, who shipped them back to Daylight in the United States. The film was processed and prints were made.

A revealing selection of those photographs was published in the Summer 2004 issue of the foundation's *Daylight Magazine*, a handsome quarterly that features unsung work by both little-known photographers and such acknowledged masters as Susan Meiselas



Clockwise from above: Nasir, 25, sells tea at a car wash in Falluja; Yussif (on left) and a friend with toy guns in Baghdad; an exploded military vehicle on the highway near Falluja; Hamed Salman's family lives in a garbage dump near Baghdad.



MAKING A MAGAZINE

Students at Sarah Lawrence College are known for their independent streak, so it's not surprising that **Daylight Magazine** (see text) got its start there. The brainchild of 2004 graduates Michael Itkoff and Taj Forer, both of whom studied with Sarah Lawrence professor Joel Sternfeld, *Daylight* was the pair's response to limited outlets for young photographers' work. "As graduation approached, we became frustrated with the lack of contexts in which emerging photographers could publish their work," says Itkoff. The quarterly has since published three issues. Says Forer, "We have passion for photography and the power of imagery, and we put that energy into starting this organization and publication." Adds Itkoff, "It's worth it."

and Joel Sternfeld. Then, in collaboration with PixelPress, photo critic Fred Ritchin's new-media nonprofit, Daylight mounted "Photographs by Iraqi Civilians, 2004," an exhibition that opened at New York University's Gulf + Western Gallery last August and is currently traveling to various universities and museums. (Go to daylightmagazine.org/projects to see an extended portfolio.)

"The photographs offer a unique window into the lives of people living in a war-torn land," says *Daylight Magazine* coeditor Michael Itkoff, who founded the organization with Taj Forer (see sidebar, left) after graduating from Sarah Lawrence College last year. "They've generated a great amount of interest." Indeed, the show has been widely covered by the mainstream media whose shortcomings the project itself sought to address, including CNN, *The New Yorker*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

More than snapshots, the photographs embody the strange truth that in war, terror and normalcy can coexist—and that terrible things can achieve a frightening kind of normalcy. On the one hand they show shovel-wielding gravediggers walking to a burial site in Falluja; black smoke billowing from an American

military vehicle just down the road from the photographer's car; and one of 500 families living in a Baghdad garbage dump. On the other, they show schoolchildren at recess, middle-class living rooms, little boys brandishing toy guns, and people receiving medical treatment for injuries not war-related.

Last November Daylight sent additional cameras to the project's original participants so that they could continue to document their lives as much-ballyhooed elections came and went. And now a full-length book of the material is in the works. For more information about this remarkable project, including an exhibition schedule, and for information about *Daylight Magazine*, contact Michael Itkoff at mike@daylightmagazine.org. ■

