

Journal Santa Fe

TUESDAY
APRIL 14, 2009
50 CENTS
EDITION

A ZONED PUBLICATION OF ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

BOMBED TAXI FROM IRAQ ON DISPLAY



DEAN HANSON/JOURNAL

Dominique Chevaucher of Santa Fe photographs the remains of a taxi that was destroyed by a bomb in a Baghdad marketplace in 2007. The car was on the Plaza on Monday as part of traveling display called "It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq."

Conversation Piece

Exploded Car From Baghdad Stirs Talk About War

BY KATHALEEN ROBERTS
Journal Staff Writer

The rusted car sits, crumpled on the Plaza, its smashed metal doors and roof folded like fabric.

The exploded Baghdad taxi is part of a traveling exhibit about the war in Iraq. Project artist Jeremy Deller, Iraqi artist Esam Pasha and Army reservist and Iraq war veteran Jonathan Harvey are escorting the nearly flattened sedan from New York to Los Angeles. The piece goes to Phoenix after Monday's Santa Fe stop.

Hosted by SITE Santa Fe, "It Is

What It Is: Conversations About Iraq" is a non-partisan temporary installation designed to kindle a dialogue about the ongoing violence in Iraq.

On Monday, onlookers trickled up slowly to take a look, then the questions came out. Their initial curiosity usually focuses on the circumstances surrounding the car, Deller said.

"We haven't had anyone get angry with us," he said. "I was expecting anger. People have been incredibly polite. Most people are very intrigued."

A bomb destroyed the car on Al-Mutanabbi Street, Baghdad, in March

2007 in a tragedy that killed more than 30 people. The street, named after a well-known Iraqi poet, was the site of numerous book markets and cafes considered the nexus of the city's cultural and intellectual life.

Deller has towed the car from Washington, D.C., through Philadelphia, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Kansas City, Memphis, New Orleans and Houston before stopping here.

In Santa Fe, an RV labeled "It Is What It Is" sat parked on the Lincoln Avenue side of the Plaza. A black and

See EXPLODED on PAGE 3



DEAN HANSON/JOURNAL

On the Santa Fe Plaza on Monday, Iraqi artist Esam Pasha, left, speaks with Iraq War veteran Jonathan Harvey while seated on the fender of a car destroyed by a bomb in Baghdad in 2007. Both men are traveling with the bombed car as part of a traveling installation intended to provoke dialogue about the war in Iraq.

Exploded Taxi Starts Conversations

from PAGE 1

white tent both shaded and framed a literature-strewn table in the center of the Plaza, while city workers dug soil nearby. Pedestrians on their way to work and the occasional tourist stopped for a look.

"They stay for hours"

"It's good; it kind of keeps the dialogue open — hoping nobody was killed," said Santa Fe's Joe Metzger, on his way to work at the New Mexico Municipal League.

"I think it's good for people to see, and I think it's great they have an interest here," Palace of the Governors portal artist the Cheryl Arviso said, adding that a friend's son had been injured in the bombing of a Humvee in the war.

Her mother, Lori Hesuse, said the project reminded her of the anti-Americanism she experienced during a 2001 Middle East trip.

"They'd just kind of look at us and walk away," she said.

The project has triggered some touching reactions in

war veterans, Deller said.

"The military have been scarred by their experience," he said. "Sometimes they freak out. But then they stay for hours."

Deller bought the car at cost from an art curator in Holland who warned him it would be very difficult to obtain one from Iraq.

"He said it took him about 6 months," he explained. "He went into incredible detail and it was incredibly complicated. It had to do with ownership."

No agenda

Harvey joined the tour because there was no political agenda. He cleared the project with his detachment commander before joining it.

"If it'd been pro-war or anti-war, I wouldn't have been interested," he said. "People can just talk about it, and they don't have to take a position. It doesn't matter whether we should've gone to Iraq in the first place because we're there. What do we do now?"

"The main criticism the

project has is that it's not taking a position," Harvey continued. "There are people from the anti-war crowd who are bitterly opposed to our not taking a position. It's the paradox of neutrality. I had one woman who took the 'Universal Soldier' approach of blaming the soldiers."

Viewers most often want to know if he'll have to return to the war after serving through most of 2008.

"If my company gets called up again, I will," he replies.

Some viewers want to know what Iraqis think of Americans.

"If you go by looks alone, they love us," Harvey said. "We drive by, and they wave and smile."

But the military serves as an armed presence, not unlike the police, he added. The welcoming gestures don't necessarily convey affection, he said.

"It means you recognize them as authority."

Four close calls

Most Americans have never met an Iraqi, said Pasha,

who sought U.S. asylum in 2005.

"Usually, people have a lot of questions about Iraq — how they're handling the war, what do Iraqis feel about the war," he said. "Iraq is a large mosaic of ethnicities and religions. Iraq is a country of minorities. Nobody likes the soldiers in their towns. They know the war is not something all Americans agree on. Iraqis have very detailed, very sophisticated opinions about the war. We've lived in war for many decades."

Pasha survived what he described as "four close calls" before taking refuge in the U.S. A former interpreter for the British Embassy, he also worked as a journalist. In 2003, he executed the first post-war mural in the country in Baghdad. He bought a painting by famed surrealist Joan Miró from a looter on the streets. He tried to return the work, but the war left his bombed-out city with no museums to house it. He's keeping it in the hopes of returning it to his country someday.