

...and Counting:

Tattoo is latest medium for acclaimed Iraqi artist Wafaa Bilal in New York live performance

When: 8pm March 8-8pm March 9, 2010

Where: Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts,
Blackburn 20/20

323 W39th Street 5th Floor NY, NY 10018

Contact: Phillip Sanders, phil@efa1.org, 212-563-5855

Web: <http://www.efanyc.org/blackburn-2020/>

Artist contact: w.wafaa@gmail.com, 773-715-1133

Project Manager: Christine O'Heron 860-782-1030

Iraqi-American artist Wafaa Bilal's brother Haji was killed by a missile at a checkpoint in 2004. Bilal has lived in the U.S. since 1992 and, a survivor of two wars himself, feels the pain of Iraqi and American families who have lost loved ones. But Iraqi casualties like his brother are virtually invisible to the American public.

So his latest performance art piece *... and Counting*, will address this public perception by turning his own body into a canvas to commemorate both the Iraqi and American dead.

In a 24-hour live performance, his back will be tattooed with a borderless map of Iraq covered with one dot for each of the casualties near the cities where they have fallen. The 5,000 dead American soldiers will be represented by red dots (permanent ink or visible), and the 100,000 Iraqi casualties will be represented by dots of green UV ink, seemingly invisible unless under black light. During the performance people from all walks of life will read off the names of the dead. The entire performance will be streamed online over two cameras, one focused on his back and the other on the audience.

Bilal has become known for thought-provoking pieces like this, most notably his 2007 work *Domestic Tension* where he sequestered himself in a Chicago gallery for a month while people could fire a robotic paintball gun at him over the internet. The piece drew international attention and 65,000 shots were fired. The Chicago Tribune named him artist of the year. He also garnered much attention for the 2008 work *Virtual Jihadi*, wherein he hacked a patriotic video game-- which had previously been hacked by Al Qaeda -- to insert himself as a character on a mission to kill the president.

Bilal stresses that his work is not didactic or vitriolic, but rather aims to provoke awareness and dialogue about the toll war takes on all involved. About *...and Counting*, he says: "This ritual will symbolize a step toward recognizing the deep losses of my country, and the way those losses resonate visibly or not to these shores".

Bilal is partnering with Rally for Iraq, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to educational opportunities benefiting impoverished Iraqi youth so that they have tools they need to contribute to the rebuilding of their homeland. Founded by a group of young Iraqi-Americans, Rally for Iraq is making an impact on the future of Iraq, one student at a time. The funds raised for the scholarship endowment are both a symbolic and practical gesture. Raising one dollar for every dot, with the goal of raising at least \$100,000, the donations will create an opportunity to collectively promote the development of human capital in Iraq and help those who suffer most. Every donation will make a life-lasting impact on the future of Iraq and its most powerful resource, its people.

For more information on Rally for Iraq or to make a donation to the scholarship fund, please visit their website at www.rallyforiraq.org.

