

## BRINGING THE WAR BACK HOME By Simon Castets



Just days after the closing of Jeremy Deller's challenging yet nuanced New Museum exhibition "It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq," a program of discussions about Iraq war artifacts installed in the gallery space, the British artist and Turner Prize winner embarked yesterday on a three-week cross-country RV trip, aimed at engaging "grassroots" conversations across America. Those with concerns that such a project—conceived by a European artist and commissioned by New York-based Creative Time and the New Museum—would take a heavy-handed antiwar stance will be comforted by Deller's subtle, balanced approach. The artist, who has a long history of political works, invited both an Iraqi artist who worked at the British Embassy in Baghdad and a platoon sergeant who is a veteran of the Iraq war to join him for the trip. The wrecked car he exhibited at the New Museum—destroyed not by an American air strike but by a suicide bombing—is coming along too. On the eve of his departure, Deller talked to VMAN about relational aesthetics and what makes art. Stay tuned for pictures from his journey.

**Simon Castets: How did the idea of a road trip come about? It feels like an evocation of the ultimate American dream experience, but tied to an act of conjuring up the atrocities of war.**

**Jeremy Deller:** Yes, that's exactly it. The trip is at once something we all understand as a concept, something quite romantic in a way, but with the twist that we're towing this nightmare vehicle behind us. Especially since the RV is such a symbol of happy holidays. We are trying our best to disarm any criticism but inevitably there will be a bit of anger because of the car itself. It is an object with very few redeeming features.

**A New York Times review, though positive, challenged the nature of the piece, saying that calling it art was "to pretend it is something it isn't." Is it relevant to question the project in these terms? Was this a type of criticism you encountered with projects like The Battle of Orgreave [a filmed reenactment of a 1984 clash between striking mineworkers and British government]?**

The whole not-art thing is a bit dull. The car is certainly not an artwork, but the whole room in itself, for some people at least, probably was art. Art is about experience as well as objects. Also, the art form of performance is a fluid definition. Likewise, film—when does a film made by an artist become a film or an artwork? It is a fine line. There were two maps in the show that were bona fide artworks.

**You plan to make "impromptu stops" between the scheduled conversations, which are held at different art institutions across the country. How do you think people will react when you will pull over with your RV and the burnt car wreck, say, at the parking lot of a mall in Tennessee?**

Who knows? That's the thrill of it. I suspect we will meet a lot of former soldiers on our trip who

might understand the work better than most.

**Would you take the project all the way to Iraq?**

Iraq would be a great place to go to and do something. I might be going there later in the year.



The It Is What It Is RV