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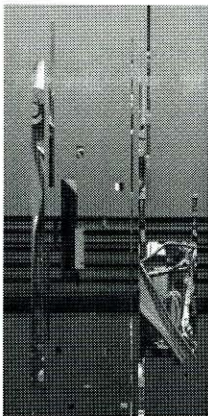


# 05 01

# Cultural Politics

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GRAHAM ALLEN WORKS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK, IRELAND. HE HAS PUBLISHED NUMEROUS BOOKS ON LITERARY THEORY AND ROMANTIC LITERATURE, INCLUDING *MARY SHELLEY* (PALGRAVE, 2008) AND *THE READER'S GUIDE TO "FRANKENSTEIN"* (CONTINUUM, 2008). HE HAS BEEN PUBLISHING HIS POETRY IN JOURNALS IN IRELAND AND THE UK SINCE 2006 AND IS WORKING ON TWO COLLECTIONS, *SOME THINGS I NEVER DID* AND *TRASIMENE*.

STEVE MUMFORD IS A NEW YORK ARTIST AND AUTHOR OF *BAGHDAD JOURNAL: AN ARTIST IN OCCUPIED IRAQ* (DRAWN & QUARTERLY, 2005). HE FIRST WENT TO BAGHDAD IN 2003 AS A WAR ARTIST, LIVING AND WORKING AMONG THE IRAQIS AS WELL AS EMBEDDED WITH THE US MILITARY. HIS ARTWORK IS REPRESENTED BY POSTMASTERS GALLERY IN NEW YORK. (IMAGES APPEAR COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND POSTMASTERS GALLERY, NY.)

## AFTER LIVY/MOSUL JOURNAL

### GRAHAM ALLEN: AFTER LIVY

These are the first few poems from a series which is in process. They form the central part of a cycle of poems, *Trasimene*, based on the lake in Umbria in which Hannibal achieved his second significant victory on Italian soil in the Second Punic War. I visit Lago Trasimene every year and over time I've worked on a collection which attempts to link modern Italian lake-life with the historical events which happened there over two thousand years ago. "After Livy" starts with a meditation on Hannibal's life after he and his army had been defeated by the Romans, something most historians don't feel the need to discuss at great length. But it moves on to consider the relation between poetry and historical knowledge, in particular issues of individual and collective heroism. Unlike Byron at the beginning of *Don Juan*, I'm not in search of a hero. I think we've had far too many heroes. Lago Trasimeno is a place that can remind people that all "heroism" fades back into the landscape and into geological time and that we should more than ever before, as Keats puts it in his meditation on poetry and history in *The Fall of Hyperion*, "think of the earth." – G.A., May 2008

### STEVE MUMFORD: MOSUL JOURNAL

These drawings are from my sixth trip to Iraq, in April and May of 2008. I spent a month in Mosul, staying at the US and Iraqi armies' combat outposts and larger bases. I accompanied the soldiers on missions every day and brought my art supplies in a photographer's vest that fit over my flack jacket so that I could work from life. I carried an artnet.com press pass and sent jpegs of my drawings to that website.

These trips were inspired by the premodern tradition of war art and history painting and Winslow Homer's nineteenth-century Civil War paintings specifically.

I was not interested in making art about the morality of the Iraq War, or its politics; nor did I want to rely on secondhand images. I wanted to record my own subjective experiences through the role of artist-reporter, and to collect material for larger oil paintings to be done back in New York. – S.M., May 31, 2008, NYC



## AFTER LIVY

1.

The storm fizzes and crackles  
 In your brain, as you scatter  
 Back to your flammable shack,  
 Your mind full of current and full of Barca,  
 The chosen one, storm-maker,  
 Sweeping down from out of the Alps.  
 He was a man who made the weather,  
 Spreading violence out of his lips, his eye,  
 Unimaginable, god-like,  
 To scholars, poets, and other men  
 Who retreat, cower and wait for death,  
 Instantaneous vaporization,  
 And can barely understand  
 The common soldier's unbroken line,  
 Their willingness to face the fire.  
 At Saguntum, for example,  
 They pushed on without him, the enemy's  
 Hot spears whizzing past their heads.

2.

Livy on the second wave, gives the detail:  
 Victories, defeats, standoffs, politics,  
 Encampments, a list of comically  
 Demotic omens, sky-crack and shining what?  
 Not withstanding. There are  
 No sides in the aftermath, Scipio  
 Junior no agent of hope,  
 No new modernity, this side  
 Of the lago's dirty wall. Barca  
 And all his pissed-up elephants  
 Is no hero to me, who twitches  
 At the furthest, muted rumble. I want  
 What he thought and what he wrote  
 Years after he declined to enter  
 Rome, declining years of non-  
 Existence everything that was left  
 To own. What did he drink? What smoke?  
 What dream? What lago did he despair on?



Combat Outpost "Hotel"  
3rd ACR  
Mosul  
IRAQ  
14-08

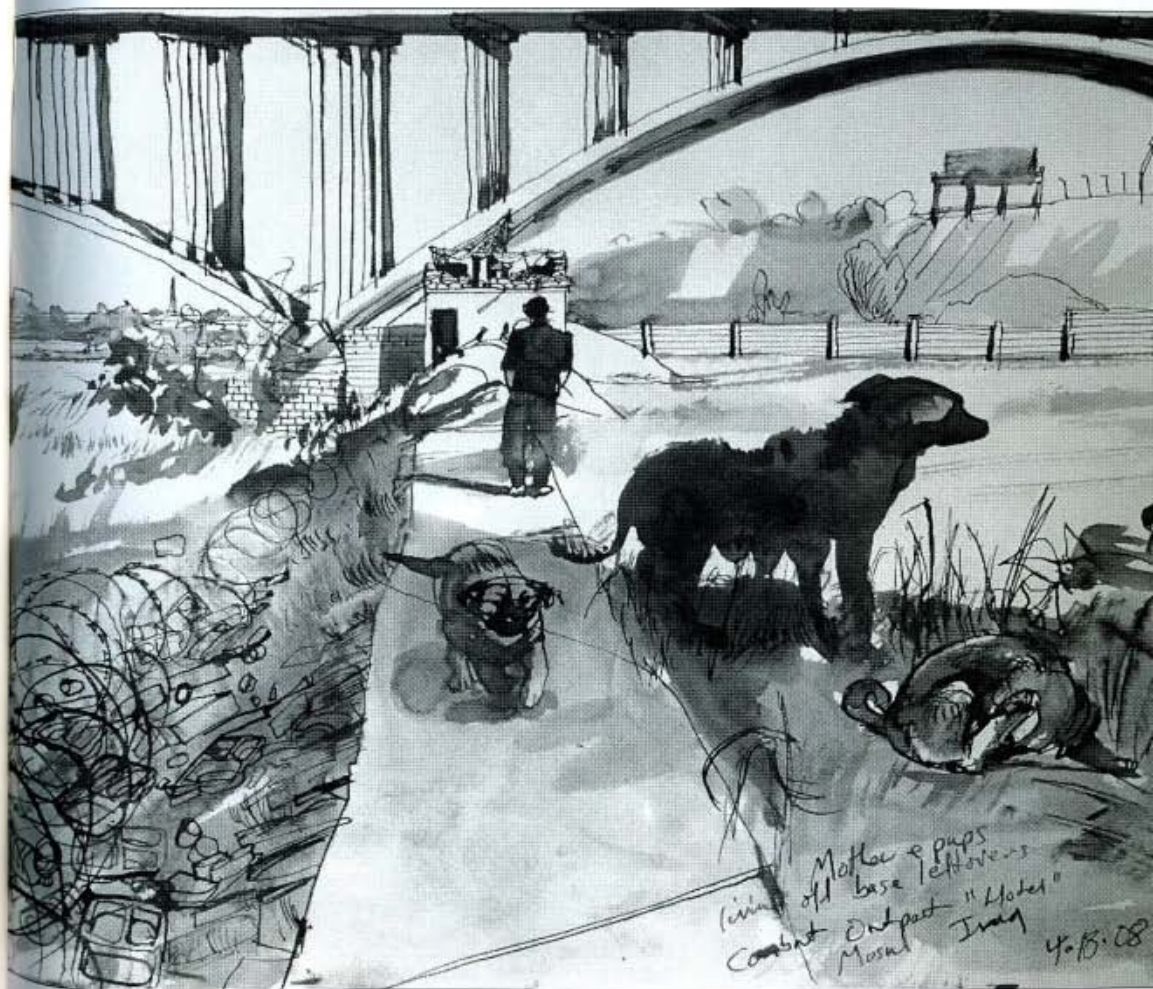


3.

Poetry is at war with history.  
 It's sad, but it's true. It has to be.  
 No matter how you turn or twist it  
 Science gives way to sympathy  
 And that won't stretch beyond these hills,  
 Unless it's coloured by today,  
 Our trivial, frivolous inconsequence.  
 Knowledge is what gets drunk and eaten.  
 Carthaginian, Roman, Celto-Iberian,  
 Who are these people to you or me?  
 Life begins and ends as a wave  
 Sucked up and spilt out by the trees.  
*La Repubblica* posts a series every decade,  
 But the facts of the matter, if you want them, are this:  
 The lake once stretched to Cortona and beyond  
 And once was a tiny pond in a ditch;  
 The hills have grown by half an inch  
 Since smarty-pants beat his neighbour at chess.

4.

He will not tell you  
 How the dead converse with the dead,  
 Continue to contest,  
 Weigh their pugilistic body weights,  
 Flipping the coin on butchery.  
 Who made most rivers bleed  
 With blood? Who caused the most smoke?  
 Who stripped the most women destitute?  
 Who captained the most diverse  
 Rainbow array of corpses?  
 Go to Lucian, if you must,  
 And compare how the Kings of carnage  
 Dispute their culls like bureaucrats,  
 Putting spin on productivity,  
 The delivery of deliverables.  
 Go to Lucian, if you must,  
 And despair, and then tell me  
 We await the return of the heroic.





5.

"I bore my exile patiently,"  
 Dryden translates, assisted  
 By eminent hands. Twenty thousand  
 Or more, lost within the icy peaks,  
 Fifteen thousand drowned, beheaded,  
 By Trasimene's shores, at Cannae  
 The unprecedented rout,  
 Outdoing the Somme, outdoing number.  
 Patiently. One would need something more,  
 Something like guilt, regret, revelation.  
 I would take enlightenment,  
 The slow, steady comprehension  
 That life is life and death is death  
 And intervention for the gods alone,  
 Not for the likes of you or me  
 Or men who enter god look-alike contests.  
 The Bin-Laden of his generation,  
 Learning to accept the necessity of love.

6.

Storming Norman confessed,  
 Though it's uncertain he was citing  
 Livy. Cannae was  
 His blueprint, ancient model,  
 His thin blue line intertext,  
 Sucking in the greater strength,  
 Like a snake consumes a dog  
 Or horse, outflanking swelling  
 Pride as a womb, suffocating force  
 With a bitter caress. But he omits  
 The final chapter of the day,  
 The afterword and epilogue,  
 The hard, bloody, liquid labour,  
 Where no foot can stand  
 And the ground begins to melt and  
 Gag on its super-sized feed  
 Of bone and blood, and the corporals  
 Hoarsely reiterate, *will we ever be done?*