

David Ebony's Top 10 New York Gallery Shows for May

David Ebony, Wednesday, May 25, 2016



Steve Mumford, *The Prayer*, 2016.
Photo Courtesy Postmasters.

9. Steve Mumford at Postmasters, through June 18.

From 2003 to 2013, Steve Mumford made numerous trips to the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan, and most recently visited the Guantanamo prison complex in Cuba. A self-styled "war artist," Mumford chronicles the day-to-day tedium of war and the plight of soldiers, rather than the drama of war's victorious or humiliating moments that make up the sensational TV sound-bites that are all too familiar to most US citizens. Sketching on site, he later transforms these works on paper into oil compositions on canvas with the help of photographs. The results are refined compositions of almost super-realist precision. This show of recent works is one of his most coherent and potent to date.

In one of the largest canvases, *Anbar* (2016), the Boston-born painter shows four soldiers in an open cockpit of a Blackhawk helicopter flying over a rural area of Iraq. The high-tech weaponry covering the soldiers contrasts jarringly with the mud shelters and rudimentary agriculture of the farm visible below. An unusual piece for Mumford, titled *Text*, bearing the words, "When I asked you how much sadness you have," sets the tone for the show. One of the best works on view, *The Prayer* (2016), is a poignant statement about a war that is all about religion—and oil. A U.S. soldier kneels in the desert, machine gun on the ground, and hands clasped in prayer. On the right, there appears to be a leaking oil drum, and in the distance, berms and barriers intended to stave off insurgent attacks.