

# Frame Job

FOUR YEARS AGO this July,

the village of Amerli, Iraq, suffered one of its deadliest suicide bomber attacks since the war began in 2003. *The New York Times* published a picture of the aftermath: a bleak, colorless landscape of destruction, with heaps of rubble in the foreground where a once-crowded market used to be. It's not a very well-known image, but it takes center stage in Hanna Hannah's latest exhibit, *Frames of War*.

Artist and UC-Santa Cruz lecturer Hannah uses this image and other scenes of international tragedy—South African shantytowns, a child buried in debris—and radically decontextualizes them in a way that makes viewers sit up and take notice. But she doesn't splatter them with blood or add more grotesque details for simple shock value; instead, Hannah adds flowers—romantic, luxurious, full-bodied flowers.



ART

Courtesy of the arts photo by Ron Jones

**BORDER ACTION** Hanna Hannah sets a tragedy in a floral setting in "Untitled (South African Shantytown)."

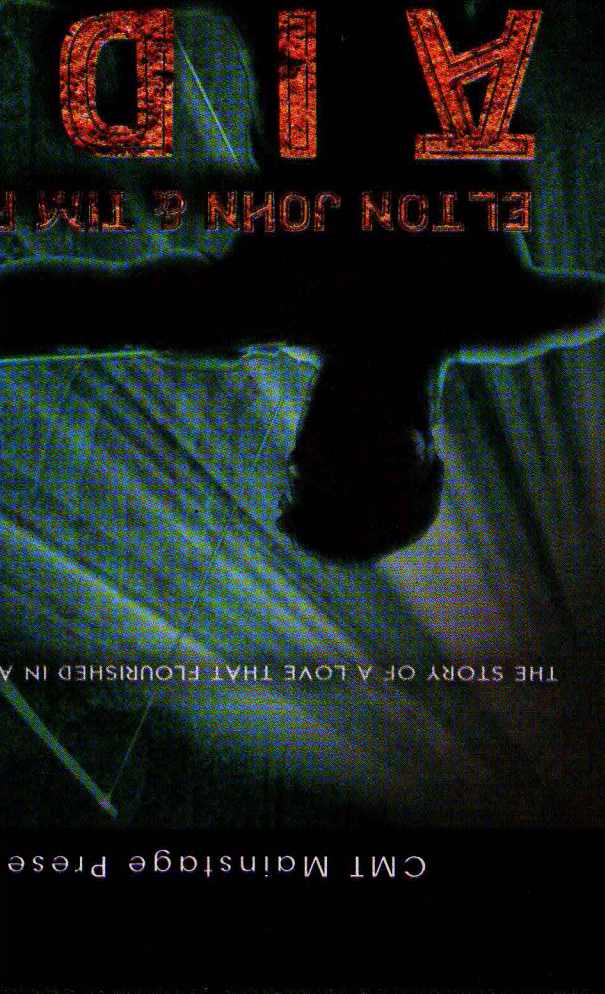
The images of war occupy only the smallest space in most of her

## Frames of War

Runs through Sept. 10 San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art

pieces, while the flowers grow to extravagant proportions. Her paper canvases run large, up to 6 feet high, and two of her installations cover four walls each. One of them, titled (*embedment*), displays a small room wallpapered with Hannah's gorgeous floral paintings, and fragments of the Amerli image are framed and hung, like family photos on someone's grandmother's wall. That is, if the colors on her wall were reminiscent of army camouflage—browns, greens and golds swirl around the room—and the people in the frames were survivors of the Amerli attack.

*Frames of War*, however, doesn't just make an ironic comment on desensitization and violence in the media; that would be too easy. Hannah's work does critique our indifference, but it also offers a poignant eulogy to these disasters. It's important to note that while the images of war are artistically reproduced and literally placed in a bed of roses, the images themselves are not romanticized or even much changed. Despite the lavishness of Hannah's paintings, we are still confronted with the less beautiful reality of what has happened in places like Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon. Like flowers at an unmarked grave, Hannah's work reminds us of, and honors, what we may have forgotten.—Sarah Sukstir



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