

NEW RELEASE

Christopher Sims  
***The Pretend Villages***  
*Inside the U.S. Military Training Grounds*

Published in association with the Center for  
 Documentary Studies at Duke University  
 Texts by Christopher Sims, Wells Tower  
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**Rehearsing war: behind the scenes of the US military forces**

*The Pretend Villages* documents the inhabitants and structures of imagined, fabricated Iraqi and Afghan villages on the training grounds of US military bases. Situated in the deep forests of North Carolina and Louisiana and in a great expanse of desert near Death Valley in California, these villages serve as strange and poignant way stations for soldiers headed off to war, and for those who have fled from it: American troops encounter actors, often recent immigrants from Iraq and Afghanistan, who are paid to be »cultural role-players.«

Christopher Sims photographed in these surprising and fantastical realms over a fifteen-year period as US wars abroad fluctuated in intensity. With this book, he presents an archival record of »enemy« village life that is as convincingly accurate and comically misdirected as it is mundane and nightmarish.

**Christopher Sims** is the Undergraduate Education Director at the Center for Documentary Studies and a Visiting Associate Professor of the Practice at the Sanford School of Public Policy, both at Duke University. He lives in North Carolina.

His recent exhibitions include shows at SF Camerawork, Cambridge University, the Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art, and the North Carolina Museum of Art. He was selected as the recipient of the Baum Award for Emerging American Photographers in 2010, chosen as one of the "new Superstars of Southern Art" by the Oxford American magazine in 2012, awarded the Arte Laguna Prize in Photographic Art in 2015, and named an Archie Green Fellow at the U.S. Library of Congress in 2017.

Artist's website: [www.chrissimsprojects.com](http://www.chrissimsprojects.com)

**Wells Tower** is the author of *Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned*. His fiction and nonfiction have appeared in the New Yorker, GQ, Harper's, the New York Times Magazine, and elsewhere. He lives in North Carolina.

»The citizens of the imaginary village of Mosalah had gotten word that a convoy of U.S. infantry would soon be arriving in town. From up near the mosque, a plywood shack whose minaret was a section of upended corrugated drainage conduit, a man in a mule-drawn cart gave the traces a smart snap. A pair of honey-colored mules clopped groggily toward the bazaar, where the noonday air was like the center of a compost heap. Nearby, the proprietress of a simulated fruit stand adjusted the position of a fake banana, which lay amid a vibrant plastic bounty arranged to form the letters "U.S.A." Across from the fruit stand, villagers wearing gingham head scarves and Middle Eastern-style robes over blue jeans and tennis shoes stood in the shade of a tin carport, listening to Arabic pop music wheedling from a boombox. Beneath a second carport, two older, sun-poached men in desert-drab fatigues were trying to outfit a villager's arm with a sleeve of gore-spattered rubber meat to make it look as though he had been freshly maimed by an improvised explosive device (IED).«

From the essay *Under the God Gun: Battling a Fake Insurgency in the Army's Imitation Iraq* by Wells Tower, originally published in Harper's Magazine (January 2006) and reprinted with permission of the author.

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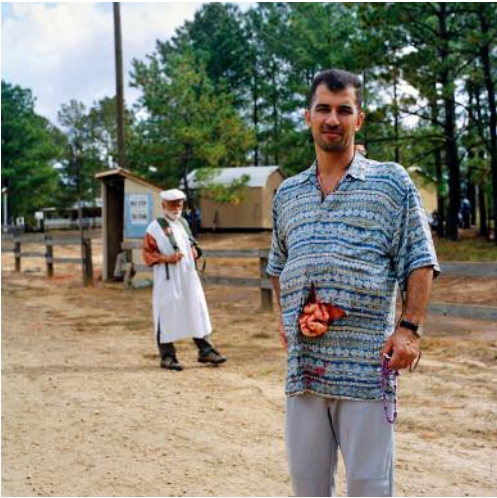
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