

Shock Iraq torture photos raise ethical dilemmas



A photo by the Bayeux-Calvados Awards for war correspondents, and taken by Iraqi photographer Ali Arkady, from the VII Photo agency, as part of his cover of the Mosul battle entitled 'Kissing Death.'

They are like the infamous images from Abu Ghraib prison, only worse. Iraqi civilians in Mosul facing rape, torture and murder from members of their own army who had retaken the city from the Islamic State. "They are the most sinister, upsetting pictures I have seen in my entire life," the veteran BBC war correspondent Jeremy Bowen said of the images taken by Kurdish photographer Ali Arkady. This weekend the brutal series of pictures called "Kissing Death" Arkady took last year while embedded with members of an Iraqi special forces unit, won France's top prize for war correspondents.

The photographs were not just "really strong" said Bowen, who chaired the Bayeux-Calvados jury, "they were evil". But it wasn't only their content that disturbed the jury. Arkady, 34, admitted to being pressured into hitting two suspects during a torture session to save his own skin, actions of which he said he was "not proud". But other war photographers asked whether a line had been crossed? While Bowen insisted that "the service he did by taking those pictures is more powerful than the fact he made some mistakes", others were not so sure.

Another member of the jury, who asked not be named, told AFP that he was disturbed by the ethical issues the "shocking" pictures raised. "The story is not clear. A lot of people think he has been very brave in telling this story... but I think we are not sending the right message in rewarding this type of work," he added.

He admitted his mistakes

Arkady was forced to flee Iraq with his family earlier this year, bringing with him images and films which he said proved war crimes were committed by the Emergency Response Division (ERD) which he had followed for two months. Arkady said he kept working with the unit after the torture began partly from guilt because he had painted the soldiers as heroes in an earlier

report for the US television network, ABC.

"What began for Ali as a positive story about Shia and Sunni Iraqi soldiers fighting on the same side against a mutual enemy, turned into a horrific journey that included torture, rape, killing and the theft of innocent Iraqi civilians by the ERD," said the US-based photo agency, VII, who helped get him out of Iraq. "I'd seen two heroes (the unit's commanders) do something bad," Arkady said. "They started torturing people, raping women. Everything changed in my mind. I was confused. I decided to investigate more."

Bowen, who has spent decades reporting from the Middle East, said the fact that Arkady had exposed abuses that would otherwise have gone unreported was the overriding factor. "I think it is very important he admitted the mistakes he made. In moral terms, he is not a torturer," he said. Award-winning British war photographer Sean Smith of The Guardian, who was not on the jury, said he "would not condemn" Arkady either. For him, however, "the system which put him in that position—where often inexperienced locally hired freelance 'stringers' provide the coverage" from dangerous war zones, is the real problem.

Whole system compromised

"The whole thing has got so compromised because major news organizations are sending fewer and fewer experienced people," he said. "There is no one there. Virtually all the coverage is coming from stringers and social media," he said. Stringers often go "from not covering any-

thing to covering extreme stuff. They just feed the machine" of photo agencies that want to show "they are still in the business even if they don't cover most things anymore."

"And then when something goes wrong, the guy becomes a scapegoat and everyone becomes very self-righteous." VII co-founder Gary Knight said that the agency did not know what Arkady had uncovered while he was working on the story. "We did not pressure Ali to publish the images,

“Most sinister, upsetting pictures I have seen in my entire life”

the opposite is true," said Knight. "We suggested that he think long and hard... because we knew that he would have to leave the country for his own security — possibly forever—if he did," he added.

Knight said he and the agency's other acclaimed war

photographers Christopher Morris and Ron Haviv had mentored "Ali for years to offer him support and advice". Smith said although Arkady should not have taken part in torture, photographers were sometimes put in desperate positions. "If you go with people like that you can't say, 'I don't agree with what you are doing.' You blend in and disappear, you may even end up getting drunk with them." For there is always "a very real danger you can end up dumped by the side of a road with a bullet in your head", he said.—AFP



Iraqi photographer Ali Arkady receives the Photo Prize award during the closing ceremony of the 2017 Bayeux-Calvados Awards for war correspondents in Bayeux, northwestern France. — AFP photos

New Fifty Shades novel from Christian's point of view

Once again, E L James is letting Christian Grey speak for himself. Vintage Books announced yesterday that the next "Fifty Shades" novel, "Darker: Fifty Shades Darker as Told by Christian" will come out Nov 28. "Grey," published in 2015, also was told from Christian's point of view. James said in

a statement that the new book would give readers a "darker and more haunted" take on Christian. James' original "Fifty Shades" trilogy, the sexually graphic saga of Christian Grey and Anastasia Steele, has sold millions of copies. — AP



In this file photo, author E L James arrives at the amfAR Inspiration Gala in Los Angeles. — AP

Original Bananarama line-up announces first US tour

It took a kitchen sing-song to get '80s British pop group Bananarama back together and out on the road after 30 years. The girl group's original members - Sarah Dallin, Keren Woodward and Siobhan Fahey - say they are touring the US for the first time in February. Fahey left the band in 1988 to form Shakespears Sister, and Dallin and Woodward have been performing as a duo in recent years. They were joined briefly by Jacquie O'Sullivan, who took part in a 1989 world tour but left in 1991.

"We were having a dance around Siobhan's kitchen a few years ago," Woodward told The Associated Press in an interview. "And I said to her, 'you just don't understand the love and how it feels when you are getting your songs sung' and I

just thought it was such a shame she had never experienced it with us and it just seemed like such a crying shame really."

Fahey, who now lives in Los Angeles, said she was excited to perform the band's songs live. "I am re-familiarizing myself with our body of work over the summer," she said. "I was so proud, it is really something to celebrate." Rehearsals began this week and tickets go on sale Friday. Some British tour dates have already sold out. "It has been a constant love wave actually this time around. Times have changed and people seem to appreciate us a lot more this time," says Fahey.

Bananarama's stateside success began with "Cruel Summer" of 1983, which became a hit after the track was picked to appear on the

soundtrack for "Karate Kid." The group said it realized how big the song had become when Mike Tyson once sang the lyrics to them as they walked past him in his limo. Further hits included "Venus," "I Heard A Rumor" and "Robert DeNiro's Waiting," which led to a London meeting with the Oscar-winning actor.

The group was once named by the Guinness World Records as the most successful girl group of all time. The group's North American tour begins in Los Angeles on 20 February, taking in San Francisco, New York and Toronto, Canada.—AP



In this photo, members of 'Bananarama' from left, Siobhan Fahey, Sara Dallin, and Keren Woodward, pose for a portrait in London to promote their new tour. — AP

Great pumpkins! Grower wins trifecta of giant food titles



In this photo provided by Susan Jutras, Joe Jutras stands with his world record breaking, 2,118-pound squash, following a weigh-in at Frerichs Farm in Warren, Rhode Island. — AP

A Rhode Island grower is first in the world to achieve a trifecta in the hobby of growing gargantuan foods: world records for heaviest pumpkin, longest long gourd and now, heaviest squash. After previously breaking two records, Joe Jutras got his third during the weekend when he smashed the giant squash record with one that weighed more than a ton. His green squash tipped the scales at 2,118 pounds during a weigh-in at Frerichs Farm in Warren on Saturday.

His other titles came in 2006, when he broke the record for longest gourd, with a 126.5-inch gourd, and in 2007, when he broke the record for largest pumpkin, with a fruit that weighed in at 1,689 pounds. Both previous records have since been surpassed, but Jutras is the only grower so far to break world records in the three most competitive categories. "It feels great," Jutras said Monday. "It's really been a goal of mine to try to achieve this."

Jutras has been working on the trifecta for a decade, since his pumpkin win. He was close to the goal a few years ago, but then a squash on track to break the record split. Now 62, Jutras recently retired from his work as a high-end cabinet maker to devote more time to his

hobby. Jutras noted that others had won multiple world records for fruits and vegetables before, but in categories such as carrots that are not as competitive.

He credits a new soil cultivation technique and a seed from last year's world record breaker for this year's win. Ron Wallace, a multi-time pumpkin record breaker, called Jutras' feat "unbelievable." He said Jutras' accomplishment showed the best of the hobby. "It's about people competing and pushing the boundaries," he said. Jutras said his fruit is headed to New York City, where it will be on display this month at the New York Botanical Garden.

In February, he'll receive a coveted "green jacket" honor for his squash record at the annual convention in Oregon of the Great Pumpkin Commonwealth, considered the NFL of giant fruit and vegetable growing. Asked what he plans to do next after achieving the trifecta, he said he's been thinking about the bushel gourd. "I think the record now is about 279 pounds," Jutras said. "That might be something I might want to get into a bit." —AP