

New Film Is a Cross Between Abu Ghraib and 'Girls Gone Wild'

By **CHANNING JOSEPH**

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If you're an exhibitionist willing to strip and lie down in a pool of blood, or if you would get a kick out of being part of a pornographic human pyramid, then it may be your lucky day if you can hustle over to the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Filming begins today in Brooklyn on scenes depicting the abuses at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison for "Memorial Day," a film backed by REM's Michael Stipe and the producers of the Oscar-nominated 2004 movie "Maria Full of Grace."

The drama-documentary follows a group of American GIs from a depraved holiday party — with date rape and fraternity-style binge-drinking — to military jails in Iraq where, according to the film's publicity material, "M-16s, peer pressure, fear, sexual obsessiveness, and sexual humiliation (among the soldiers) create a giddy, bloodthirsty, frat-house atmosphere" where "torture is a party and partying is war."

"It's sort of like 'Girls Gone Wild' meets Abu Ghraib," the director, Josh Fox, told *The New York Sun*. Indeed, one of the themes of the film will be pornography because, Mr. Fox said, the sexual nature of the Abu Ghraib images is their true significance.

"These are by far the most-seen images from the Iraq war. When you think about why they're so incredibly popular — for the lack of a better word — you have to conclude that it's because they are sexual. It's not [simply] because they are horrifying," he said.



JOURNEYMAN PICTURES

SEXUALIZED TORTURE Actors perform in a scene in which a soldier sits on a detainee's chest.

Adapted from the dramatic performance "The Comfort and Safety of Your Own Home," staged by Mr. Fox's theater troupe, International WOW, in 2004, "Memorial Day" doesn't seek to replicate the events at Abu Ghraib so much as explain why they happened.

"What is it about us" as Americans "that makes us want to do these things?" Mr. Fox asked.

With that in mind, "Memorial Day," Mr. Fox's debut as a film director, has attracted some prominent funders, including Journeyman Pictures, producers of "Maria Full of Grace" and this year's "Half Nelson," as well as Jim McKay and Mr. Stipe's C-Hundred Film Corporation, which produced 1999's "American Movie" and 2004's award-winning "Brother to Brother."

"It's an amazing convergence of like minds," Mr. Fox said. "Michael and Jim are incredibly great dramaturgs, advisers — and very daring."

Still, Mr. Fox has had to resort to a

mass e-mail to find extras for his Abu Ghraib re-creation. After all, he said, "it's very hard to find people who are willing to do what is in those pictures."

Under the heading "Get naked for peace and justice," the e-mail said, "We need a few (hundred) good men. To get naked, put a bag on their head, and lie around a prison for a few hours in pools of blood and possibly in strange human pyramids. While other actors smile and make fun of you!"

Since the e-mail went out, "we've gotten tons and tons of responses," Mr. Fox said. Shooting

for those scenes begins today and continues over the next two days at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Mr. Fox said he expects the film to be ready to make the festival rounds in early 2007, with a tentative nationwide release scheduled for Memorial Day.

Although International WOW is a member of the anti-war coalition Theaterers Against War, Mr. Fox said the film does not have an explicitly anti-war message. It is more of a commentary on the culture's relationship to pornography, he said.

"This film does not seek to condemn Abu Ghraib as much as it seeks to explain it," Mr. Fox said. "I wouldn't call this film an anti-war film. ... War is one of those things that people do, but ... the fact that porno has gone mainstream has done a lot to the way we perceive sexual relations. It's a gigantic change in our culture."

In light of this, he added, "This overtly sexualized torture is not a surprise."