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IN THE GALLERIES: ADAM HELMS

By Mary Voelz Chandler

New York-based artist Adam Helms strikes a timely note in an installation that addresses issues of fear, occupation and repression. Anyone who wandered around downtown last week knows the feeling of living in a state of high anxiety, wrapped in high-level security and the knowledge that someone is watching every move.



ADAM HELMS' 2008 *SHADOW (PORTRAIT OF A JIHADI)*, IN DOUBLE-SIDED SILK-SCREEN ON VELLUM. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY, NEW YORK, AND SISTER GALLERY, LOS ANGELES.

In this new work at MCA DENVER, Helms creates an environment that mixes numerous mediums to evoke a bit of that angst. His blurry images of countercultural soldiers from the "Shadow" series, in double-sided silkscreen on vellum, are eerie, while the untitled ink drawings on Mylar hanging across the gallery seem encrypted, a code that each viewer will have to crack on his or her own.

This is just an atmospheric run-up, though, to the monumental plywood sculpture - more a construction, really - at the center of the museum's Paper Works gallery. This combination of guard tower and hiding place carries the bitter flavor of fear. Helms has made it appear as if someone "occupies" this intricate structure, with maps, photos and other memorabilia both personal and political.

In a climate where terror is the stuff of daily discourse, Helms has found a way to capture and distill unpleasant reality, and make us think.