

# RIVERS BAGHDAD



Theresa Caruana, *Source Material RIVERS BAGHDAD, (Rivers Times Square)*, 2009 mixed media collage  
Theresa Caruana, *Source Material RIVERS BAGHDAD, (60 percent water)*, 2009 mixed media collage

**A public artwork from the city of Baghdad with global reach made possible through technology, creativity and the human impulse to connect.**

**Inaugural event 22 June, Benjamin Franklin House, London, 9am – 9pm**

RIVERS BAGHDAD is a groundbreaking project, using new media to explore complex human relationships against the backdrop of Baghdad. Beginning with an exhibition at Benjamin Franklin House on 22 June, this ongoing process of exploration and art making will include a public artwork, projected live from the city of Baghdad and streamed globally to private and public screens.

Curator Meredith Gunderson, new media artist Theresa Caruana and New York Times security advisor for Iraq, Andy Arkell have developed this collaborative project. Working in partnership with Mixed Reality Lab, the UK's leading computer science research unit at Nottingham University, new technology is being developed to create an immersive and interactive artwork placing participants into a virtual Baghdad which can be navigated using a mobile phone.

All artwork is mindfully absent of politically charged images, instead taking inspiration from water – an essential and universal element of life. RIVERS BAGHDAD involves participation from audiences through digital technology. Internationally, anyone with internet access will be able to take part in and contribute to the artwork. Interactive access to the project can also be achieved through digital social networks such as twitter, facebook and a vox blog site.

Curator Meredith Gunderson works with irregular exhibition formats and says: “RIVERS BAGHDAD is a multi-faceted, open-ended porous project where the collaborative process is as important as any completed artworks. Presenting the creative process is an interesting challenge, and later this year the live projection from Baghdad will be an exercise in doing a simple thing in a complicated environment.”

About the project she further states: “We are living amid a new social moment of coming to grips with the information age. RIVERS BAGHDAD explores a reaction to this and the resulting complexities of shared experiences through technology. The virtual world is a different democracy allowing endless exposure to human stories and imagery of global life. We aim to explore what it means to absorb these images, by developing artwork that is physical, virtual and social.”

The RIVERS BAGHDAD exhibition on 22 June at Benjamin Franklin House will include artworks and demonstrations of the creative and technological processes of the project. Selected press, partners and patrons will be invited to experience RIVERS BAGHDAD to lend their feedback, a vital ingredient in this creative process. The event begins at 9am – 9pm, with a reception from 7pm. Performances and presentations are scheduled throughout the day. A timetable for the day is available upon request.

**The exhibition will include:**

- **Baghdad 2009** - This artwork is an immersive and interactive environmental map of the city of Baghdad with annotations by the artist in collaboration with national museums, Iraqi residents and commentators on the web. This installation piece gives the viewer an opportunity to view and navigate the city of Baghdad, using new mobile phone technology. This artwork is made possible by an ongoing collaboration with Ben Bedwell at Mixed Reality Lab, Nottingham University.
- **Zeinab – London Baghdad, 2009** A performance by artist Theresa Caruana, re-enacting a simple chore of scores of women living in Baghdad as described over email by a close contact and native citizen to Baghdad, Zeinab.
- **Source Material, Rivers Baghdad, 2009** – The process of the artist is laid bare with a range of visual material created as artist research. Specifically, the artist is exploring questions about the nature of water and rivers and its effect on humanity. This body of work includes collectable unique pieces for sale on the day (collect@riversbaghdad.com).
- **Presentations** by the curator and artist will take place throughout the day. These are scheduled at 11am, 2pm and 6pm, followed by a drinks reception. The RIVERS BAGHDAD team will be present throughout the day to provide information, and refreshments will be provided. Interviews with the curator and artist during the event are available by arrangement.



*Baghdad Sheraton Ishtar, Tigris River Park, photo courtesy of Jamesdale10  
Andy Arkell and Meredith Gunderson at Benjamin Franklin House looking at a portion of Baghdad 2009*

For more information, press enquiries and to arrange an interview with the curator and artist, contact Laura-Mae Browne on 07817 925 991 / 07863 036 540 email [press@riversbaghdad.com](mailto:press@riversbaghdad.com). For information about works for sale email Diana Findlay and Meredith Gunderson at [collect@riversbaghdad.com](mailto:collect@riversbaghdad.com)

**Notes to editors:****Who is involved?****Meredith Gunderson** – Curator and Producer

Meredith Gunderson is a London based independent curator and cultural strategist, with over 12 years professional experience working with contemporary art in the UK and US. She is a devotee to exploring the role of art in the public realm and an expert in delivering exhibitions with unique formats. Naturally collaborative, Meredith has a depth of expertise involving patrons and sponsors as well as major gift fundraising for progressive cultural projects. Meredith currently runs Culture House for Princes Charity, Arts & Business, an invitational membership scheme for art philanthropists stimulating and facilitating cultural philanthropy in the UK. Meredith is also engaged as a consulting curator for an award winning chain of hotels, City Inn where she advises on strategic partnerships with cultural organisations and delivers a UK-wide programme of changing exhibitions of contemporary art set within the 24 hour public spaces of the hotels.

**Theresa Caruana** – Artist

Theresa Caruana is an internationally active new media artist specialising in large-scale public projection. Caruana frequently works with displaced, marginalised or remote communities to explore, discuss and document our natural environment. She creates art that transforms public space into virtual landscapes, driven by a desire to facilitate a physical experience where the stability and sureness of space becomes as fluid as the imagination. Theresa's sponsors include: The London Wild Life Trust, DEFRA, EMDA, and Adobe Systems Inc. Theresa is a visiting Fellow at the Mixed Reality Lab at the School of Computer Sciences, University of Nottingham.

**Andy Arkell**

Andy Arkell has spent the last three working as Security Advisor to the Baghdad bureau of The New York Times. Previously he worked as security consultant to reconstruction projects in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Prior to that he was, at various times, an officer in the army, advertising executive, labourer, fish-farmer and Buddhist monk. Having lived and worked in Baghdad for the last three years, he describes himself as passionate dissenter from armed violence in all its forms. He hopes that this project will be his Baghdad swan-song. Thereafter he is committing himself to building and running a modern, secular retreat centre for professional and creative people.

**Ben Bedwell and The Mixed Reality Lab**, Nottingham University

Ben Bedwell is a Research Associate at the Mixed Reality Laboratory in Nottingham, where as part of his ongoing doctoral research funded by EPSRC, he is exploring new forms of interaction made possible through the combination of mobile phones with technologies situated in public space. Most recently he has worked with choreographer Willi Dorner, Nottingham's Broadway Centre and experimental dance organisation Dance4 producing a series of events fusing technology and performance for exploration of the city of Nottingham.

**The Mixed Reality Laboratory (MRL)** at the University of Nottingham is a dedicated studio facility where computer scientists, psychologists, sociologists, engineers, architects and artists collaborate to explore the potential of ubiquitous, mobile and mixed reality technologies to shape everyday life. The MRL was first established in 1999 with £1.2M funding under the JREI programme and its facilities were updated in 2005 through a further £1M under SRIF 2. The laboratory is currently home to over fifty academics, research associates and PhD students who are undertaking a wide ranging programme of research into mixed reality and its applications. Between 2000 and 2007, the MRL was the lead partner in EPSRC's Equator IRC, a £10M collaborative initiative exploring the interweaving of physical and digital interaction for everyday life. The Mixed Reality Lab was co-founded by Professor Steve Benford, Professor of Collaborative Computing and Head of the School of Computer Science at the University of Nottingham. There is an official ongoing collaboration between Rivers Baghdad and MRL. MRL is also choosing to fund segments of the project.

**'Zeinab'**

'Zeinab' is a life-long Baghdad resident with over 10 years experience of working in media and education in Iraq. She works as a news reporter, translator and journalist in Baghdad. She has also worked as a social worker, developing literacy education programmes for Iraqi women. (Zeinab's name has been changed for security purposes).

**Partnerships:**

We are engaged in dialogue with prospective partners from government agencies, cultural institutions, technology companies and patrons of the arts. Mutually beneficial partnerships and collaboration are a core value of RIVERS BAGHDAD. Laura Mae Browne, Arts Communicator for RIVERS BAGHDAD, can supply details of current partners and opportunities for partnering, [laura@riversbaghdad.com](mailto:laura@riversbaghdad.com)

**Benjamin Franklin House** is located in central London by Charing Cross: 36 Craven Street WC2N 5NF. A location finder and map can be found at [www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org/site/sections/visit/location](http://www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org/site/sections/visit/location)

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