

Richard Klein, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum exhibitions director and curator of James Esber's exhibit of Osama bin Laden drawings, discusses the project Tuesday with WestConn photography students.

A sudden shift of history

Osama bin Laden: Images take on new meaning at Ridgefield's Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

By Robert Miller
Staff Writer

RIDGEFIELD — In sepia and black, 157 images of Osama bin Laden are mounted in neat rows on the white walls of the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum.

In some, the beard is all black, in others, mostly red — in some, the red stains the black. On some, cross marks stain his cheek like scars. In others, the markings look like jet planes.

One has a faded circle over much of bin Laden's head. With only a bit of imagination, it looks like a target.

Adam Calderone, of Newtown, a student at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury, saw the exhibit by artist James Esber a couple of weeks ago. He said he was interested in the technique — how each of the 157 images, traced by 157 different people — altered the Esber's original drawing.

Calderone revisited it Tuesday, the first time the Aldrich had been open since Navy

See Events on A7

If you go

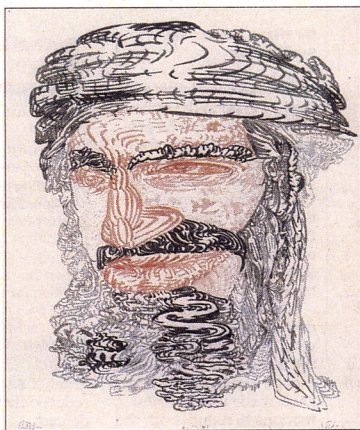
■ **WHAT:** "Your Name Here," an exhibit of works by James Esber, including his 157 images of Osama bin Laden

■ **WHERE:** Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 258 Main St., Ridgefield

■ **WHEN:** Through June 5. Hours: Tuesday-Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.

■ **ADMISSION:** Adults, \$7, seniors/college students, \$4

Free to museum members, K-12 teachers and children 18 and under; free on Tuesdays and to active military families



SCOTT MULLIN/FOR THE NEWS-TIMES

James Esber made a drawing from a well-known image of Osama bin Laden and invited 157 people to make a drawing from his original drawing. Some are on display at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield.

From the front page

Events change perception of images

Continued from A1

SEALs ended bin Laden's life on Sunday. The sudden shift of history altered Calderone's perceptions about what he was seeing.

"It's different," he said. "It has more meaning."

Which doesn't surprise Esber, who lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

"The uses of the image and what people project on it will change," Esber said. "It will be interesting to see."

Esber started on the project, "this is not a portrait," he said, several years ago. Interested in the use of iconic images, and how it can change with repetition and history, Esber is attracted to projects that involve cooperation among artists.

Using a news photo of bin Laden, he recreated it as a drawing, using black and sepia — reddish-brown — ink.

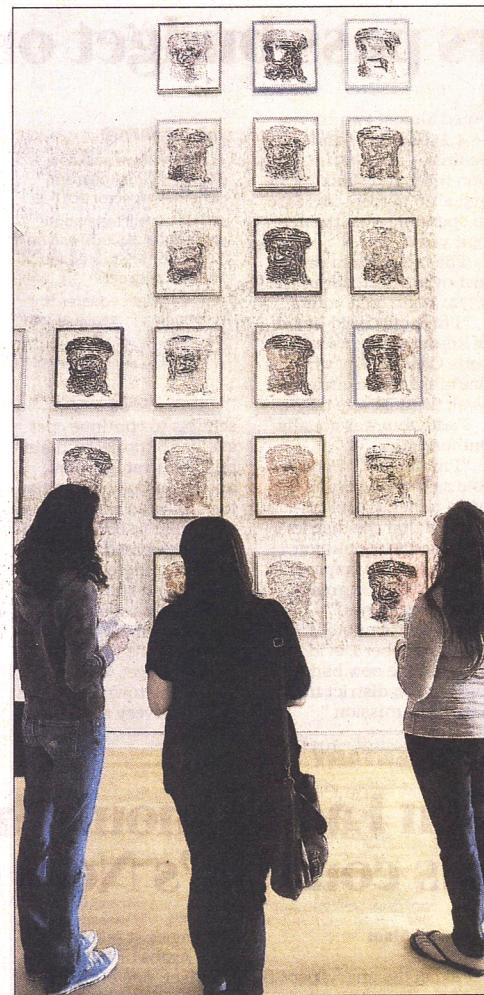
"I liked it so much, I did 10 more," he said.

He then began getting friends, family and colleagues — not all of whom are artists — to recreate his drawing. They traced it on parchment paper using sepia and black ink and a Chinese brush. While they had to be true to the original image, they were free to improvise shading and the thickness of each line and use of the two colors.

For the Aldrich exhibit, part of a show of Esber's works titled, "Your Name Here," about 30 people signed up for a workshop supervised by Esber and again, added to the collection of images.

"They're triple portraits" Esber said.

"They're of Osama bin



SCOTT MULLIN/FOR THE NEWS-TIMES

WestConn photography students look at James Esber's exhibit of Osama bin Laden drawings at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield on Tuesday.

Laden. They're portraits of me and what I brought to the image. And they're portraits of the people

who made the images."

Richard Klein, the interim co-director of the Aldrich, said Tuesday that

the exhibit, which opened Jan. 30 and will run June 5, was not intended to create controversy, nor had it

"This show isn't about Osama bin Laden," he said. "It's not a homage to bin Laden. It's about an image."

But he admitted that when he walked into the gallery Monday, it was not the same place.

"There was a totally different feel to it," he said. "It's about history."

Cathy Vanaria, who teaches Calderone's photography class at WestConn, was with her students when they walked into the Aldrich on Tuesday. They were the first people to see the Esber exhibit since bin Laden's death.

"I thought 'Oh, the bin Laden stuff is up,'" she said. Like Calderone and Klein, she has seen the exhibit before and found its meaning had changed.

Sandra Morey, of Norwalk, another WestConn student, was seeing it for the first time.

"You can see the anger people feel toward him," she said, pointing out the intensity some people brought to tracings.

Vanaria said she hopes Esber will continue with the project. If people saw bin Laden one way immediately after 9/11, they saw him differently after he went into hiding. His image has an immediate impact.

"It will keep changing," she said. "I hope he continues."

Contact Robert Miller at bmiller@newstimes.com or at 203-731-3345.