The art attacks heat up in war on propaganda

A new exhibition examines the War on Terror in ways that the mainstream media do not, says Christopher Wood.

Two opposing opinions are sometimes voiced about the conditions necessary for art to flourish. The Truman Capote and Oscar Wilde versions, let's say. In 1950, Capote joined a US theatre company touring Porgy and Bess around the Soviet Union. He joined down the noble sentiments expressed by the group's host at the Russian Ministry of Culture: "When the cannon fall silent... the masses are heard."

A lovely thought, but a flat contradiction of a famous monologue delivered by Wolof in the film The Third Man. Wolof, playing Harry Lime, points out that centuries of peace and briefly life in Switzerland had produced frighteningly little in the way of artistic glory. Unless one considered the nickel show.

So which is it? Is peace or war most conducive to creativity? Is art a blemore on responsive to the needs of human kindness or to a bloody war?

The War on Terror may shed some light. In the theatre, the representations of conflict that have existed here produced by the mainstream media have not been based on the human and Butler reports. They have been based simply on the media that may be viewed at a specimen of human fundamentalism.

A range of artists involved, describes her video Planet of the Arakas as "a short, thriller-esque montage in the tradition of Hollywood's utilization and demonization of Arabs and Muslims". Sullivan, whose parents are Palestinian and Saudi, grew up in the US with Arabs as her first language.

She was so struck by the lack of positive representations of Arabs that she grew up that she once found it embarrassing to be one, which made it painful for her to survey more than 20 films over several decades of Hollywood output for her piece.

"Some of them you just have to laugh at, they're so ridiculous. The one that angered me most was Rules of Engagement. The Arakas were so dehumanized, they hardly spoke, and when they did, they were lying."

The show seems likely, then, to provide strong evidence that many artists are not only vocal on the subject of the war, but are providing a type of provocative discourse not always available in the media. That's exactly as it should be, says Ramadan. "We have no doubt that art's role is essential for today's society," he insists. "In the past ten years, the artist has totally switched character. It's more social, based on social communication in a realist level. Fantasy is fine, but you cannot be like the classical painters and observe from a distance. In contemporary art, you have to deal with reality on an everyday basis."

At the Age of Terrorism will be held at the Miller Gallery, The Southbank Centre, 6101 to January 29.