

How to Unpack a Bomb Vest

Start with the vest itself, each pocket stuffed with scriptures and explosives, hatred and nails, belief and batteries. No. Start with prayer on Friday, or Saturday, or Sunday. No. Search online for where the materials and the rhetoric were bought. No. It's at the hardware store, the mosque, the chatroom. Begin with an olive tree, a way of life, a desert sky. First, learn a language spoken for thousands of years. Learn its words for forgiveness, for war, for love. Learn every word for revenge spoken by anyone who has seen a drone. It is scrawled in the concrete dust of Aleppo, in pockmarks across the walls of Baghdad. The source bubbles up from the ground, black, thick, pungent. Start with the forests of dinosaurs. No. Start with the treasures of the west. Look in your gas tanks for the instructions on demilitarizing sleeveless tops. Drink the poetry of nomads and scholars for a taste of old bloodlines and darkness. Walk the back alleys of grievance in the shadows of pyramids. Cover yourself with hijab and begin with apology. It is there, in worn carpets and stained coffee cups, in bombed out hospital wards and torture cells. Dig a hole six millennia down through generations of soldiers' bones and sacrifices to God, deep in the cool earth between two ancient rivers, and get in it. This is where you will find the directions for grace written in carbon, written in breath, written in songs whose lyrics the dead have long since forgotten.

Matt Hohner

Published online at [Rattle: Poets Respond](#) (text and audio recording, May 25, 2017).