

Introduction: Artwork



Tara Leigh Tappert

At the July 2012 Military Experience and the Arts Symposium at Eastern Kentucky

University, I sat with a participant who struggled to understand the meaning behind the artwork that was used for the cover of JME 2. When the artist, Jessica Dittbenner, came to the microphone to talk about her painting, my companion took in

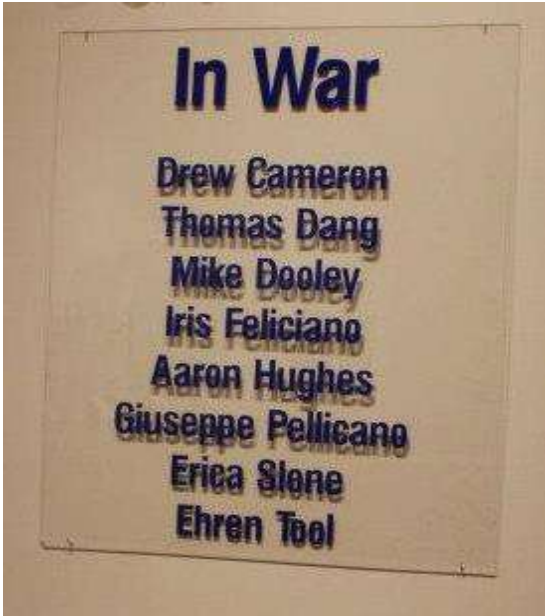


Jessica Dittbenner describes her painting; courtesy of Lisa Day.

everything she had to say, and the significance of the artwork was unveiled not only for her, but for everyone else in the room. The experience of witnessing confusion transformed to clarity and understanding stayed with me and has been an inspiration for the Arts Section of this volume of the journal.

Artwork by combat veterans often addresses particular themes, and subtle meanings are frequently imbedded into the

work that is inherently understood by those who have been a part of a military community. Some arts initiatives—like Combat Paper Project workshops for veterans—have also had an intentional purpose of providing an outlet for veterans to creatively interpret their military experiences. The artwork produced resonates for those with similar knowledge, but without some levels of



Courtesy of Giuseppe Pellicano

interpretation it does not easily translate for civilian observers whose experiences have been very different.

Artwork is one of the most powerful ways to provide bridges across the military and civilian divide. The artwork included in this volume of the

journal represents the creative output of 25

artists—active duty service members, veterans, and a few civilians—and the intent is to have the meaning of the work accessible to everyone viewing it. From those who served in Vietnam and Desert Storm, to those who fought in our most current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, to civilians who have been affected by war, these artists have used multiple forms of artistic expression—

painting, sculpture, photography, art installation, mixed media, ceramics, handmade paper, a storytelling performance, and a documentary film production—to translate their experiences of war and military service.

There are two articles in the arts section of the journal. The first article is of artwork submitted to the journal by 16 artists. To assist in interpreting the work nine themes have been identified that respond to the artwork and also correlate to the life cycle of those who serve in the military—from recruitment to reorientation. Additionally, there are artist biographies, artist statements, and when provided, descriptions of the work. The second article is of an exhibition held November 2012 to January 2013 at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois, by members of Warrior Art Group, a show that was a part of the 2012/2013 In War initiative developed by the National Veterans Art Museum in Chicago. Eight artists are represented in the show.

Editors

Tara Leigh Tappert is an independent scholar and archivist and an American art consultant. She holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from George Washington University. In 2010 Dr. Tappert was awarded a research grant from the Center for Craft, Creativity & Design to study 20th century American military uses of arts-and-crafts making for rehabilitation, vocational training, and soldier wellbeing. From this grant she launched The Arts and the Military, a grassroots organization that produced Arts, Military + Healing: A Collaborative Initiative at major cultural, educational, and medical institutions across the greater Washington, D.C. area in 2012. She is the exhibitions curator for Combat Paper Project, and the arts editor for *Journal of Military Experience*. She recently completed a narrative report about the Smith Center for Healing and the Arts, Wounded Warriors Artist-in-Residence Program at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

Kate Rouleau is a student at Pennsylvania State University majoring in International Affairs with a concentration in International Relations. She developed an interest in the military and the arts after moving to the Washington, D.C., area with her family, especially when her father began working as an engineer for the Marine Corps. She is honored to have the opportunity to learn about the stories behind each piece of artwork included in this volume of the journal.