In War: An Exhibition by Members of Warrior Art Group

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Tara Leigh Tappert

In the past five years the number of exhibitions tackling themes of war hosted by museums and by college and university galleries has been steadily increasing. Many veterans who have seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, and many civilians who have been affected by the costs of these wars are turning to the visual arts to make sense of their experiences.

In November 2012—on Veterans Day—the National Veterans Art Museum launched IN WAR: Intergenerational Trauma, the 3rd annual collaborative initiative in their IN WAR series of events, art shows, and performances hosted at venues throughout the greater Chicago area. Among the offerings were two exhibitions—Welcome Home, on site at the museum in Chicago, and IN WAR: An Exhibition by Warrior Art Group, in the Schoenherr Gallery at North Central College, in Naperville, Illinois.

There was also a theater performance of Trajectories at the Athenaeum Theatre, a film screening of Poster Girl at the Pritzker Military Library, a community showcase by Vet Art Project at the Chicago Cultural Center, a Body Be Well workshop by VetCAT at the Albany Park Community Center, a reading at the museum from Craig Smith’s book Counting the Days: POWs, Internees,
and Stragglers of World War II in the Pacific, and other museum events, including a roundtable discussion and a lecture.

The exhibition at North Central College—a military-friendly school located just 30 minutes from the Chicago Loop—was organized by Army veteran and college alum Giuseppe Pellicano and by veteran-artist Aaron Hughes, a National Veterans Art Museum board member. The Schoenherr Gallery featured the work of eight war veterans affiliated with the Warrior Art Group, a grassroots organization that promotes the work of more than 40 artists located in 15 states across the country. The exhibit showcased the creative expressions of men and women whose military service spanned from the Gulf War in the early 1990s to the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Participating artists included handmade paper maker Drew Cameron (San Francisco), sculptor and photographer Giuseppe Pellicano (Naperville), ceramists Ehren Tool (Berkeley, CA) and Thomas Dang (Glendale, CA), photographers Iris Madelyn (Chicago) and Michael Dooley (Naperville)—a North Central College alum, mixed media artist

![Gallery installation photo – Courtesy of Giuseppe Pellicano](image_url)
and sculptor Erica Slone (Columbus, OH), and painter Aaron Hughes (Chicago).

**Drew Cameron’s Portrait** of David Tool and Ehren Tool is a handmade sheet of paper created from a blend of the uniforms father and son wore during their service in Vietnam and the Gulf War. This portrait—one of four in the exhibition—spoke to the 2012 *In War* theme of intergenerational trauma. Both father and son had saved uniforms from their respective wars, and the handmade paper project provided an outlet for both of their stories. The digital photographs from **Giuseppe Pellicano’s** Grenade Series—*Tea Time* and *Oh Happy Day*—also addressed the theme as both images depict the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on soldiers and their families.

![Gallery installation photo — Courtesy of Giuseppe Pellicano](image)

Other artists in the exhibition approached the subject of war from additional perspectives. **Ehren Tool’s** small, utilitarian, ceramic cups are decorated with images of war and violence, and are created at the scale that he considers appropriate for conversations about war. The 209 cups included in the show were
given away at the end to those in attendance. This gifting of cups is Tool’s way of creating awareness around issues of war, and to date he has given away more than 14,100 of them.

**Thomas Dang** combines experiential performance, memory, and storytelling into the ceramic pieces he makes. While there is something whimsical about *Claymore Flask* (2012)—transforming a mine into a drinking vessel—his intent is serious, provocative, and educational. The deadly Claymore mine—its inventor named it after a large Scottish medieval sword—fires by remote control and is used in ambushes and as an anti-infiltration device. Soldiers who have used Claymore mines in combat respond to the colorful green ceramic flask in an entirely different way than that of a civilian. While a soldier who understands the deadly power of the mine may find its conversion to a benign drinking vessel amusing, Dang’s mine/vessel is also educational as it can serve as a conversation starter across the military-civilian divide. Both Tool and Dang have been trained as ceramists and work in the traditions of the San Francisco Bay Area Funk Art Movement: work made from clay holds an elevated position; everyday and found objects are incorporated into completed work; pieces are often (inappropriately) humorous; and audience engagement is typically a part of the making process. Both men are second-generation artists working in this tradition and what they so brilliantly add to the Funk Art mix are biting and humorous social commentary regarding issues of war in the 21st century.

**Iris Madelyn** is a photographer who explores themes of personal identity in her seven disjointed self-portraits titled
(un)clothed and in her right mind (2012). Her piece is filled with messages that convey how the externals of the military uniform—festooned with insignias of rank and status—wrap up and protect the individuality of the person who has worn it as a “second skin” for many years. Madelyn created this work to help her sort through issues of self-definition when the wearing of that uniform was no more. In her photos the stark realism of her uniform, medals, boot, flag, and parts of her body suggest that either in or out of uniform one must take great care in crafting one’s personal identity.

Michael Dooley is also a photographer delving into personal issues related to his military service. The three photographs included in the exhibition—Friends, Frustration, and Subtlety—deal with dark and troubling themes, but are also about navigating post-military service reintegration. Militarily trained to recognize the possibility of death, Dooley explores the ways in which survival and the return to the civilian world require a new way of thinking about life. How does one find friends again, what paths must be followed to find sustaining and satisfying employment, and what outlets are most helpful in dealing with inner demons? Dooley uses photography and writing to help mitigate anxiety and cynicism. Themes of transformation and letting go are also at play in the sculptural work by Giuseppe Pellicano. Masked Memories is a pulp paper translation—the pulp is from military uniforms—of an actual gas mask. This art piece changes a dangerous but protective object into an aesthetic memory. Pellicano also pays
homage to the gun he carried while in service. *Bye My Darling* was created, exhibited, and then burned.

Like Iris Madelyn, Michael Dooley, and Giuseppe Pellicano, Erica Slone’s *An Unfit Effect* (2010) examines her personal experience in the military, but with an additional agenda of scrutinizing issues of social, political, and religious power as they are expressed within military contexts. As a lesbian woman who served under the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy, Slone, through her multi-media installation, investigates the validity of the policy and its historical roots in conservative religious convictions. This piece, filled with combat boots, a pair of red patent leather high heel shoes, broken doors, a step ladder, and sand, is a compelling conversation starter regarding gender issues and the military.

*Gallery installation photo – Courtesy of Giuseppe Pellicano*

**Aaron Hughes**, who co-organized the exhibition with Giuseppe Pellicano, regards his artwork as a testimonial of his deployment. Hughes has noted his preconceived notions of how the world worked were thrown into disarray with his military service. Art making has acquired a spiritual dimension and he uses
art as a tool to confront dehumanization, militarism, and occupation.

*Road Stop and I Remember Standing There*... are two of the paintings from Hughes’ Tourist Photographs Series. These large 4 x 4 foot realistic oil studies capture how truly awkward American service members—whom Hughes regards as tourists—appear while stationed in a Middle Eastern country—Iraq—for which they have almost no understanding of the culture, people, or politics.

Taken as a whole, the eight warrior-artists represented in this exhibition use the arts to provide glimpses of their particular military experiences. Their work is for fellow comrades who know the drill, but also for civilians where the intent is to educate and enlighten. While some themes are universal—reintegration after military service, and issues of trauma sparked by combat experiences—the forms of expression—Funk Art influenced ceramic pieces, digital photographs, and mixed media installations—are entirely 21st century interpretations. But even the paper making pieces—portraits and sculpture from combat uniforms—created in a medium that can be traced to antiquity, tell 21st-century stories of the wars fought by today’s young American men and women. Art making is known to relieve stress and anxiety—and warriors have used the arts to deal with trauma as far back as the wars in ancient Greece. These eight contemporary warriors—all members of the Warrior Art Group—have found solace and expression in time-honored arts traditions.
The Artists and Their Works
Drew Cameron is a hand papermaker, printer, and book artist based in San Francisco. He earned an undergraduate degree in Forestry from the University of Vermont and served in the U.S. Army from 2000-2006. His love for paper works began as a teen but was rekindled at the Green Door Studio Artist Collective in Burlington, Vermont, where he became the managing director from 2006-10. Drew co-founded the Combat Paper Project in 2007 and has maintained direction of the project since its inception. His current and ongoing work is with Combat Paper and as a partner in Shotwell Paper Mill in San Francisco, where he is practicing and teaching the art and craft of hand papermaking and encouraging others to do the same.
I began to write and create visual art as I was separating from the military in 2006. Since then I have been on a tireless pursuit to not only investigate my role and responsibilities in the military and warfare but to also provide a creative space for others to do the same.

Description:

In the summer of 2012 I was invited by W.A. Ehren Tool to attend his two-week residency at the Craft and Folk Art Museum in his hometown of Los Angeles. The show, *Production or Destruction*, was a retrospective with a site-specific construction of 1500 new cups. During his stay Ehren set up his ceramic wheel on the street in front of the building and created new work and
engaged with whoever came through. For my part, I spent a three-day weekend with my portable paper mill creating paper with patrons of the museum. His father, David Tool, a retired U.S. Army Colonel, an academic affiliated with University of Southern California and a cultural translator to China had recently returned to Los Angeles and was available for the duration of his son’s residency. Because of the fortuitous timing and because of my growing collaborations with Ehren—this began when I relocated to the Bay Area—we planned to create paper from a blend of his and his father’s uniforms. David had been an infantry platoon leader in the Army in Vietnam and Ehren had served as a Marine Corps Military Police officer in Saudi Arabia and Iraq during Desert Storm.

The olive drab jungle fatigues and desert camouflage uniforms were deconstructed and cut into small attentive pieces by Ehren and David, and then mixed together. Unlike most Combat Paper recipes, David’s 100% cotton Vietnam uniforms blended with Ehren’s 50% cotton and 50% nylon cammies, required no additional stabilizing fibers. Over the course of the weekend David and Ehren created nearly one hundred 9 x 12 inch sheets of paper.
I asked if I could have a small batch of the unused fibers to create a portrait of them. They graciously agreed.

Since 2007 I have worked with hundreds of veterans, directly facilitating the creation of paper from their particular uniforms. For good reason many people are interested in a batch that is specifically their blend of fiber. Yet the opportunity to blend their fibers with those of others is always presented at the workshops, as the intent is to add to a growing lineage of fibers from military uniforms. In addition to the opportunity to blend their fibers with those of others, another thing regularly occurs at the workshops. At some point participants offer the remaining un-pulped uniforms for future workshops. This growing collection of little bags of uniforms—halfway cut apart, a waiting liberation into paper—has come to represent another phenomenon for me, the histories of the people who wore those uniforms as well as the narratives of the fibers. The military uniform itself carries an awesome potential for other kinds of investigation.

For many years the Combat Paper workshop process was the liberation of rag to create paper and the embellishment of the paper with images and text. More recently I have become interested in all of the stories embedded
within the fibers. I have struggled for an appropriate way in which to illustrate the variety of stories within the fibers and to find a universal format that would allow equal footing for the viewer and for the participant-creator. I found the inspiration I was seeking in working with David and Ehren Tool.

Coming home from war is a difficult thing. There is often much to account for as a survivor. A new language must be developed in order to express the magnitude and variety of the collective effect. Papermaking has become my language and Combat Paper my form of expression—sharing stories and creating fiber from the remnants of war. The communal and alchemical paper making process inspires temporal conversations woven with remnants and threads of tangential memories. Countless times during these passing moments I have had the honor of hearing “a story never before told.” In the wake of a story first unveiled, how can one veteran help carry forward the story of another?

Creating fiber from the remnants of war and doing it within a group sharing process took on new meaning when I worked with the Tools, two generations of war fighters, and myself, the most recently returned. From the batch of their unused fibers I created a sheet that represents a proper homage of the two of them—father and son. There are five portraits now: W.A. Ehren Tool with his father David Tool, Trent Albee, Sammy Villarreal, David Drakulich, and Anthony Sgroi (his is an American flag).

The portraits are just beginning. For now they are larger than usual and carry the tone and geography of the uniform used in the work. They are from individuals I have directly worked with and
taught how to pulp their uniforms. It is a way for me to offer something back for their offerings—a reciprocity and strength for their story to again be told. It has taken me five years to be comfortable with a large sheet of blank paper hanging on the wall. It is some of the paper that I am most proud of, and I plan to make many more.

22 December 2012
The fibers for this sheet of paper came from a workshop with David and Ehren Tool in Los Angeles, California, from uniforms they wore while deployed in Vietnam and Desert Storm.

Wall Label Text:

W.A. Ehren Tool
When I told my WWII Marine Veteran grandfather I had joined the Marines he laughed and then he said..."They are going to take
your soul." Two years later I was in Kuwait wearing this uniform. One morning the sky to the north was black. As the day went on the blackness got closer until we were in the blackness. None of us knew what was happening. I honestly had the thought that this might really be the end of the world. That I would die in this blackness. It really looked like evil manifest in the physical world. I felt that if I died there I would not be able to escape that evil even in death. It was not the end of the world, for me. All of the vehicles and uniforms that were in the oil fires were stained. I don't think I lost my soul in the war but I think my soul is stained.

David Tool
Beyond patriotism, beyond why governments say they are facing combat, to find inner peace then and afterwards, it is essential that soldiers find within and for themselves deeply personal missions or social/ethical beliefs for which they are willing to make this potential sacrifice of life or limb.
The fibers for this sheet of paper came from a workshop with Sammy in Fullerton, California, using the uniforms that he has described.

Wall Label Text:

*Sammy Villareal*

I used a uniform from when I first entered the Marines in the 1990’s and one I wore just before I got out 11 years and 8 months later. When people ask me why I got out, I say that I would be a Marine until the day came when I wasn’t entirely proud to wear the uniform...
The fibers for this sheet of paper came from David’s military uniforms, provided by his parents at a workshop in Reno.

Wall Label Text:

*David J. Drakulich*

David proudly joined the U.S. Army in 2004 after attending Truckee Meadows Community College for two semesters. He served as a forward observer, rifleman, and parachutist and was awarded the Bronze Star for his heroic efforts and sacrifice.
David enjoyed snowboarding as well as listening to rock-and-roll while smoking a pipe or good cigar with his father. He was to complete his third and final tour in May of 2008, and then he looked forward to returning to school in the fall to pursue art. He died for his country in Afghanistan on January 9th, 2008. To commemorate David’s passion for art, his parents, Tina and Joe, created the David J. Drakulich Memorial Art Foundation for Freedom of Expression. The DJD Art Foundation built the Veteran Artist Project, which hosts workshops at the Reno VA Hospital. They also procured a grant to form a Combat Paper Mill in Reno, Nevada where they will host ongoing workshops and programming for veterans and their families.
The fibers for this sheet of paper came from a workshop with Trent in Marshalltown, Iowa, and are from a uniform he wore while deployed in Cuba.

Wall Label Text:

*Trent Albee*

Land was confining, tense, and merciless
I went underwater to stay sane
My escape was at the depths of the ocean floor
It was my abyss of solitude and peace
MA2 Trent Albee (Guard)
Guantanamo Bay, Cuba
Oct 2009 – Oct 2010
**Giuseppe Pellicano (U.S. Army)**

**Giuseppe Pellicano** is a United States Veteran who served in Germany, California, and Kosovo from 2000 to 2004. He completed a B.A. in Studio Arts at North Central College in 2012, and is currently in the MFA Program at Northern Illinois University. Pellicano has exhibited his work in various shows and galleries, including the Prak-sis Gallery and Jackson Junge Gallery, both in Chicago. He has also presented work in Jen Deveroux’s *Animal Royal Fashion Show*, and in an installation at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Arizona, where he partnered with Ordi and Ali. He was selected to show *War Pigs* at the National Conference of Undergraduate Research at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah.
The Grenade Series
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Giuseppe Pellicano (U.S. Army)

The Grenade Series are photographic illustrations of the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on soldiers and their families. The grenade symbolizes attempts to reintegrate into civilian life. It was chosen for its three uses that can be mirrored in those who suffer from PTSD.

Grenades are used for attack whether in self-defense or offense; they are used to signal for help and also to provide cover. Soldiers who suffer from PTSD often become defensive and lash out due to increased anxiety, they may also seek help to find consolation, or in many cases they hide their suffering and detach. It is important to understand their struggles and recognize the battles they continue to face when returning home from conflicts.
Tea Time
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Giuseppe Pellicano (U.S. Army)

Description:

*Tea Time* represents a soldier’s attempt at re-familiarizing him or herself as the father/mother figure within the family. The simple task of playing “tea time” with one’s daughter is challenging as the experiences of conflicts never fade. Although the soldier may be present in this pleasurable engagement, his or her mind is still terrorized and the memories remain.
Oh Happy Day
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Giuseppe Pellicano (U.S. Army)

Description:

*Oh Happy Day* provides a glimpse of the desperation of the other half in coping with the soldier’s disability. The stress and hardships spouses or loved ones often contend with impact their own mental and physical health. They can feel helpless in providing support and understanding to their returning soldier or they are unintentionally abused and suffer alongside them.
Description:

*Masked Memories* was created from a mold of a gas mask and paper pulp made from the uniforms of combat veterans. The uniforms possess the memories of war and trauma, and the mask represents the concealment of the veterans’ emotions and experiences.
My interest in sculpture stems from my experiences as a soldier. These experiences lead me to search for passionate and creative means of exploring my emotions and beliefs in politics, religion, and psychological distress. I am in agreement with many artists who feel art is not meant to fix problems, but to make others aware that they exist. This awareness may lead to change or at the very least comfort and understanding through conversation.
Bye My Darling
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Giuseppe Pellicano (U.S. Army)

Description:

*Bye My Darling* is homage to the weapon I carried while in service. Surrounding the base of the sculpture were photographs of the sculpture’s cremation. Viewers were invited to take them. The piece was set afire as a symbol of bidding my weapon farewell. I will never be able to hold, aim, or fire it again, but the memories remain. This work was inspired by *Living without Nikki*, a poem written by Drew Cameron.
W. A. Ehren Tool is a third-generation soldier who served as a Marine in the Gulf War in 1991 during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. His work as a ceramist is heavily influenced by his military service. When he left the Corps in 1994, Tool studied drawing, and then later earned a BFA from the University of Southern California in 2000 and an MFA from the University of California at Berkeley in 2005. Through the production of clay cups decorated with press molds of military medals or bomb, and images of war and violence he seeks to raise awareness and generate conversations about war. His cups are often assembled, broken or intact, into installations or are used in videos. He then gives them away, often mailing them to corporate and political leaders. A United States Artists Berman Bloch Fellow, he now works and teaches at UC Berkeley. Tool also lives in Berkeley with his wife and son.
209 of Thousands
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W. A. Ehren Tool (U.S. Marine Corps)

Description:

The cups are made to remind people about issues of war and violence. They are the only useful scale to talk about such issues. Face to face and hand to hand—share a beverage—and talk about war and violence.

Stoneware Cups (2012), 48 X 25 X 5 in., 11 rows of 209 cups, Photo Courtesy G. Pellicano
Description:

Since my experience in the Marine Corps, I have been wary of the gap between stated goals and actual outcomes. I am most comfortable with the statement “I just make cups.” I’d like to trust that my work speaks for itself, now and over the next five hundred thousand to one million years. Peace is the only adequate war memorial. All other war memorials are failures at best and are usually lies that glorify war. I am compelled to make work that talks about the strange places where military and civilian cultures collude and collide. Since 2001 I have made and given away more than 14,100 cups. I believe the cup is the appropriate scale to talk about war. The cups go into the world hand-to-hand, one story at a time.
Thomas Dang was born in 1983 in Glendale, California. He received his Master of Arts in Art and is currently working on his Master of Science in Microbiology at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). Thomas has been a Graduate Assistant in both Ceramics and Microbiology, assisting professors in delivering curriculum and maintaining facilities. He is also a United States Marine who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and is Head Instructor at Rifkin Professional Karate Center. Thomas is an emerging artist who has exhibited his work in many solo and group shows at California State University, Northridge, and at venues throughout Southern California.
CLAYmore Flask
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Thomas Dang (U.S. Marine Corps)

Porcelain, Slip Cast (June 2012), 5 1/2 X 7 X 1 1 1/2 in., Courtesy T. Dang

© The Journal of Military Experience
Description:

During my two combat tours in Iraq I was confronted with and involved in many hostile engagements. Through these struggles a compelling camaraderie ignited between the combat veterans with whom I served. The purpose of my work is to allow for veterans and the community to engage in a dialogue around issues of warfare and to connect visually with the actions our young men and women have faced overseas. By doing so, we continue to keep alive and to honor those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

The CLAYmore Flask is a commentary on the history and use of the Claymore mine, and represents the sacrifices of combat veterans who have a history of using the mine on the battle field. This piece, where the function has been altered—from mine to flask—offers an opportunity for a dialogue of shared war stories among comrades. By conflating the purpose of the object, comrades can recall the harsh existence of overseas battlefields, but also the moments when therapeutic recollections of home occurred while sipping a canteen cup of horrible coffee. These small respites assisted in maintaining peace of mind. Presenting this artwork on the home front allows for veterans and the community to engage in the dialogue, to visually connect with the actions our men and women face overseas, and to keep alive and to honor the stories of those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.
Grenade Range 1 / Grenade Range 2
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Thomas Dang (U.S. Marine Corps)

Porcelain slip cast (June, 2012), 13 x 13 x 1 3/4 inches, from the collections of Thomas Dang, Glendale, CA, digital images courtesy Giuseppe Pellicano

© The Journal of Military Experience
Description:

The *Grenade Range* was created as a performance piece at California State University, Northridge. The finished work depicts the experiences and sacrifices of combat veterans. The purpose of these pieces is to allow non-military artists to experience the *Grenade Range* through performance demonstrations.

Following training periods of strict instruction and safety briefs on how to use grenades on the range, casted grenades are thrown onto target plates, allowing non-military artists to experience a military practice. The *Grenade Range* performances inspire engaging dialogue and allow the community to connect visually with specific military operations.
Iris Madelyn is a writer, an artist, and an activist. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication, Media and Theater with a minor concentration in Social Justice from Northeastern Illinois University. Much of her creative work takes on a social justice perspective especially in her activism for veterans’ rights. Since transitioning out of the Marine Corps, Iris has utilized the arts as a way to examine her military experience, to deconstruct issues of identity, to expressively share traumatic experiences, and to heal from trauma. Iris’s publications include poetry with Warrior Writers and creative writing in an upcoming anthology of the Shotwell Paper Mill in San Francisco. Iris has also performed some of her work in venues throughout Chicago.
(un)clothed and in her right mind
‡
Iris Madelyn (U.S. Marine Corps)
(un)clothed and in her right mind came conceptually from a Bible story in the New Testament where a man had been freed from demons. As the townspeople came to see him, they found the man sitting with Jesus, “clothed and in his right mind.” His clothed condition was verification of his sanity and wholeness, and the people found him fit.

That garments confirm our fitness is not a new idea. Clichés like judging a book by its cover or dressing for success ensure awareness of how we are externally perceived. Military garb, with its adornments and indicators of rank, status, and prestige, is no exception. What I found interesting is the idea that to disrobe from acceptable garments, to question adornments and the prestige with which they are associated, is to seem insane and unwell. In this series of self-portraits, I am challenging that idea and am claiming that, perhaps, the demons exist when we unquestioningly don the garments of uniformity and of social acceptability.

In the military so much of my identity was based on rank and status. While my rank and uniformity protected me from appearing weak and objectionable, at the same time my status created an identity acknowledged only by symbols and insignias. After living out of uniform for a few years, I began to feel unknowable even to myself. In stripping away the symbols with which I identified, I found myself bare and vulnerable. But this same vulnerability allowed me to begin to see who I was outside
the context of symbols without assuming defeat. Through this series of self-portraits I am trying to understand what frames identity, and I am learning to recreate my own.

The disjointedness of the images reflects the times I felt disjointed and disconnected from myself. My identity is partially connected to my military experience, to my gender, age, and ethnicity, and to the intersection of all these identity markers. Through the camera lens I am intentionally disconnecting to find a different perspective from which to examine my garments, my adornments, my skin, and my self, in order to verify my own fitness of mind and to confirm that I, too, have been freed from demons.

We all have stories, memories, joys and pains. These stories are all connected to each other, to the earth, and to the soul of the earth. Poetry and art help me to remember this connection and to remember that life is sacred. We can connect to each other and to the Source and create the world we want to live in. These stories and memories have the potential to seep out of our pores and destroy us, but they have an even more powerful potential to heal us if we only will indulge it their magic.
Michael Dooley jumped into photography after receiving his B.A. in Journalism from North Central College in June 2012. It is my desire to create a space for the viewer to think beyond what they know, to accept and question the unknown, or to challenge what they accept.
Description:

The roller coaster is over and the last leaf has fallen. I feel like a walking dead man because I have prepared myself to die, though I have lived. I bide my time to be reacquainted with my old friends.

A soldier meets many people and accepts many things over their career. As they walk down the path of conflict and war, they
become intimate friends with the only certainty of life. I believe that once a person has internalized this, it can be liberating and horrifying.

Liberation is found by understanding one’s own mortality and a heightened appreciation for every moment. Horror lies in the inevitability of life’s outcome and the futility of effort.
Frustration
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Michael Dooley (U.S. Army)

Description:

_Frustration_ is representative of how some service members feel trying to find employment after returning to civilian life. If pan handling works for some, then maybe we can panhandle for a job too.

This idea came to me in 2008 while trying to find employment after being Honorably Discharged from the military. I had applied
at a variety of shopping centers, tool stores, and gas stations but got the impression no one wanted to offer me a position, even though they were hiring.

At the time I lived in the city of Chicago, and it is hard to get on or off the highways without seeing someone panhandling. So the idea came to me that I should stand out there in my uniform and ask for a job, and not your change.

Now let me make this clear: I did have a GED. Prior to military service I was a systems analyst in an IT department. It was my sole responsibility as a part of my job to manage my company’s servers coast-to-coast. I have been working in the information technology sector since I was about 19 years old. I say that because I feel there are people who would dismiss me and say I have no real work experience. Or they might think that being in the military means I couldn’t hack it in the real world. That is not the case!
Pitter patter goes the blood splatter. // Don’t gawk or balk, but appreciate the great art that is life at its crescendo. // It’s not that I want, // It’s.... that I have to. // Logic says did you talk to a professional? // I couldn’t dare, it is too permanent in its success // .... official records and all. // The legion of “what ifs” // ... what
if “it” worked? // ... what if I wanted to continue government work or help others in some official capacity? // ... what if it failed? // ... as ruined as my current state. // Opening my mouth would be as much a downfall as silently suffering. // I wanted friends... // I wanted to be accepted ... // unconditionally ... // in the outside world; but we are mad men trapped in tiny boxes stumbling and fumbling ... eternally solar eclipsed. // I have entirely too much empathy and love; and I am disgusted with what I believe must happen, as selfish as it may seem, for myself. “Live your life,” right? Well I did, and now it’s not mine.
Erica Slone grew up in rural Ohio and joined the Air Force in 2002 to expand her horizons and to create a better life. During her military career she attained the rank of staff sergeant and served three deployments in Iraq, the last as a police officer at a detention facility. As a lesbian woman serving under the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy, she eventually had misgivings about the value of war, the grating aspects of personal secrecy, and her place in life. She separated from the military in 2008 and entered the art program at Ohio State University. Her transition from the military to civilian campus life was difficult and challenging. Concerned about
the lack of support for returning veterans and the limited understanding regarding military service and our nation’s wars, Slone became involved with the newly developed Veterans Learning Community at OSU. In 2010 she received a grant through the University’s Urban Art Space to co-curate an exhibition, *Visualizing Experiences of War (VIEW)*. Through the creation of new artwork by collaborative teams of veterans and artists, the exhibit helped broaden civilian understanding of the stories of those who had served during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The narratives of Slone’s own military experiences have emerged through the process of writing and sculpting and through her relationships with other veteran artists. Slone was the curator for the 2012 *Overlooked/Looked Over* exhibit at the National Veterans Art Museum. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with an emphasis in sculpture in 2012.
An Unfit Effect
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Erica Slone (U.S. Air Force)

Mixed media installation (2010) – with two details
From the collections of the National Veterans Art Museum, Chicago, IL
Gallery installation photos; digital images courtesy Giuseppe Pellicano
Description:

My art critiques national and cultural justifications of dividing people through visual testimony. In my work, I reconstruct my personal experiences as an investigation of social, political, and religious power structures. Engaging subjects such as the Iraq War, military culture, veterans’ care, and gay and women’s rights, my work combines both familiar visual representations and a personal vocabulary of symbols, into multi-layered pieces.

*An Unfit Effect* conflates the religion-based mentality behind the controversial issues of homosexuals serving under Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, the concerns of women in combat, and the problems behind historical conflicts in the Middle East. Is religion a valid justification of these seemingly social absurdities? Do these policies have other merits? Do the severe consequences that directly affect only a few, provide reason enough to rethink how we conduct business?
Aaron Hughes (U.S. Army National Guard)

In 2003 Hughes supported combat operations by transporting supplies from camps and ports in Kuwait to Iraq. After three extensions, totaling one year, three months, and seven days, his Company redeployed to North Riverside, Illinois, on July 24, 2004. Hughes returned to the University of Illinois to study painting. He began to use art as a tool to confront issues of militarism and occupation, later receiving an MFA in Art Theory and Practice from Northwestern University in 2009. He has been involved with many veteran/arts projects, including Warrior Writers, Combat Paper, Drawing for Peace, Operation First Casualty, Winter Soldier, the Demilitarized University, the Field Organizing Program, Operation Recovery, and the IN WAR exhibition series at the National Veterans Art Museum. (PS: Aaron Loves birds!)
Road Stop
‡
Aaron Hughes (U.S. Army National Guard)

The Tourist Photographs are a series of 4 x 4 feet oil paintings which interpret the posture assumed by American service members (tourists) in the surreal space of the Iraq War.
I Remember Standing There...

‡

Aaron Hughes (U.S. Army National Guard)

Oil on Panel (2006), 4 X 4 ft., Courtesy Aaron Hughes
Installation Text:

I remember standing there
Dust covered, dust in my teeth, the smell of heat
That Humvee was fucked
Crippled
Pieces of its body hanging off like burnt cracking flesh
The P.O.C. said three of his guys died when it got hit
I was holding the little Mag-light that belonged to one of them. I thought about keeping that charred Mag-light with holes burnt right through the whole damn thing.
It could be cool to show people how fucking crazy this whole shit was
But I started thinking about the kid you know
Damn flashlight was probably in his pocket
Holes right through him too.
The P.O.C. was getting pissed
Said those were good soldiers in that Humvee and we shouldn’t fuck with the remains.
I guess it was remains in a way.
I guess it seemed like that humvee was a corpse waiting to get buried.
Damn we would pose in front of the most fucked up shit
I remember standing there thinking this proves I was in the shit
I’m a hero you know
That’s what they told me, you know I’m a fucking hero for standing in front of that clump of death.
Three kids just like me, blown, burnt, smashed, shot, bled to death.
Fuck’m though.
They’re just a part of the whole damn spectacle.
They died heroes you know. I got the photo to prove it
They burnt to death for us you know.
Fuck, I wonder what it’s like to have a hole burning through your skin.

Description:

I am an artist, organizer, and Iraq War veteran, who seeks out moments of beauty, poetry, and connection, in order to construct new languages and meanings out of personal and collective traumas. I use these new languages and meanings to create projects that attempt to de-construct systems of dehumanization and oppression.
Iraq Triptych

Aaron Hughes (U.S. Army National Guard)
Collage on Panel (2006), 16 X 7 1/2 ft., Courtesy Aaron Hughes