

ISTHMUS

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

A & E

HOME A & E VISUAL ARTS

Uncomfortable conversations

"In Good Company" spotlights veterans' artworks

BY VICTORIA DAVIS

NOVEMBER 1, 2018



M. SCHLEIF PHOTOGRAPHY

Joshua Zeis' sculptures are made of clay and disabled IEDs. They are on exhibit at Gallery Marzen.

During her 2003 deployment with the U.S. Army in Iraq, Sgt. Yvette Pino was known, as she puts it, as “the soldier running around the desert with a paint bucket.” She was the unofficial “Division Artist,” a title she earned painting blast barriers, army vehicle doors and helipads.

“People probably thought I was crazy, chasing all those drivers down and yelling, ‘I need to paint your doors!’” says Pino. “But it really was my job. Other soldiers hated me because I got out of sandbag duty.”

After receiving a bachelor's in fine arts from UW-Madison in 2011, Pino launched [Veteran Print Project](#) to encourage dialogue among veterans, artists and the general public. Now the printmaker is curating and coordinating [In Good Company: An Exposition of Emerging Veteran Artists](#), a citywide showcase for veteran artists.

More than 20 artists will be showcasing works at 11 venues throughout the city during November; this Veteran's Day, Nov. 11, is the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice that ended World War I. Among the venues hosting veterans' art events are Arts + Literature Laboratory, Edgewood College, Overture Center for the Arts, Commonwealth Gallery and the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

One exhibit, at [Gallery Marzen](#) on Atwood Avenue, features work from Josh Zeis, a former Army medic and ceramic artist from Fargo, North Dakota. Zeis' sculptures are made of disabled IEDs nestled into cracked clay.

“The idea is to show what the earth looked like after one of these things went off,” says Zeis, who was responsible for digging up the explosives in Iraq. “Clay is kind of like a recording device, and art is a visual language. I don't have words to describe what I went through, so I'm trying to find other ways to express that, and I love seeing a tangible result.”

Zeis will be sharing his story during an artist talk at Marzen on Nov. 2. His art will be featured through the end of December alongside the paintings of

Air Force veteran [Shawn Ganther](#), a graduate of UW-Stevens Point who currently lives in Chili, Wisconsin. Ganther's works in his "Simon Says" collection feature collaged images of school children surrounded by signs that read, "Trust Simon." It is a commentary on authority.

"I thought about the kids' game, *Simon Says*, and I related it back to all the orders in the military," says Ganther. "Even when I transitioned to art, people would say, 'You're not going to make a living. There's no point. You served your country and now you're just going to be broke?' But for me, it was about love and doing something that would feed my soul, even if it wasn't the white-picket-fence life."

Ganther says he suppressed symptoms of PTSD for many years and still does not talk about some of the events he experienced during his time in the service. But Pino emphasizes that the November exhibitions are not therapeutic works.

"There's a lot of art therapy projects out there, and we often get lumped into that," says Pino. "That's just not what we're doing. People always assume it's the veterans that need the healing. There's this t-shirt that I want that says, 'Don't try to fix me.' Sometimes, it's just about having a conversation."

Visual and conceptual artist Aaron Hughes, who was deployed in Iraq and Kuwait, will stage an interactive event, the [Tea Project](#), at Edgewood College on Nov. 16. Guests will sit together and sip tea from styrofoam cups engraved with floral designs created by Hughes; the drawings are modeled on those carved by detainees at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. Each cup will also be carved with the name of a prisoner.

"I want people to share their thoughts and open up about what extralegal detention is, and torture and what those things mean for our society," says Hughes. "This is a place where people can engage with these issues that are often difficult to engage with."

Pino will also host a print workshop on Nov. 10 at the Commonwealth Gallery with fellow veteran Ash Kyrie, founder of the veterans' artist collective [Dirty Canteen](#). The workshop, screen printing on clay, is open to veterans and family members of all skill levels.

On Nov. 9, Pino will exhibit her own work at the [Graduate](#) hotel as part of *The Belligerent Party*, a print, paint and drawing exhibition with Jay Anthony Yolanda.

A musical centerpiece of the month-long exposition will take place at the Barrymore Theatre on Nov. 11. The multimedia rock and roll history show based, in part, on soldiers' letters, will feature music by Sean Michael Dargan, The Kissers, November Criminals, and The Viper and his Famous Orchestra.

“What I hope people will take away from all these exhibits is a broader understanding of the veteran experience beyond your stereotypical, patriotic, flag-waving need to discuss world politics,” says Pino. “Hopefully this helps those uncomfortable conversations go deeper.”

[ARTS](#) [VETERANS](#) [VISUAL ART](#)

RELATED

- **[In Good Company: Works from Veteran Print Project](#)**
11/3-1/10, Overture Center-Playhouse Gallery (reception 5-7 pm, 11/12).
NOV 12, 2018, 5:00:00 PM



MICHAEL KNAPSTEIN

[Art in the corridors](#)

Some of the season's more interesting art exhibits are lining the corridors of the Overture Center, writes Michael Muckian.

NOV 1, 2018



Fractured past

The mixed-media works of Nathaniel Mary Quinn, on exhibit at MMoCA starting Dec. 1, offer perspective on a fractured life and struggling community.

NOV 21, 2018