

THE ARTS AS A RESPONSE TO THE COSTS OF WAR WORLD WAR I AND IRAQ / AFGHANISTAN WARS – TODAY

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An instructional resource prepared for the 2016 NEH Summer Institute on Veterans in Society

Brief Description:

During and after the First World War, American veterans found the arts as a way to deal with the stresses and trauma they experienced at the war front. Two American soldiers, one who suffered the effects of mustard gas, and the other disabled by a German sniper's bullet, processed their war experiences through the creation of artwork. One artist made a set of watercolors, had a limited edition portfolio printed, and exhibited the work at several galleries in the 1920s. While he kept memorabilia from his war experiences, he moved on to many other things. The other artist became a celebrated folk artist in the 1930s and 1940s, and references to his war experiences are found throughout the body of work he produced from the 1920s until his death in 1946. One artist is from an upper middle class white family, the other is African-American.

One hundred years later, in response to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, veterans are once again using the arts to make sense of their war experiences. Two soldiers, both who deal with the effects of post-traumatic stress, are using artmaking for healing, commentary, and as witness. One artist has created an art practice that critiques military culture and investigates traumas of war. The other artist has created a project that documents and provides witness to the devastating effects of combat on military servicemen today. The purpose of the project is to demonstrate that these wounded warriors are "still in the fight," and that they will not be forgotten.

Activity:

These four artists are represented here by two pieces of their artwork. Spend 3 minutes looking at each piece and write down your responses to the work. In what ways do these images provide insight to the experiences of combatants during World War I and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? What stories are narrated through these pictures and sculpture? How has your awareness of these wars been enhanced by spending time with this work?

Classroom Discussion – Questions:

- Compare and contrast Marine Corps veteran Claggett Wilson and Army veteran Horace Pippin? In what ways are their experiences during World War I similar – and in what ways are they different?
- As a disabled, African-American veteran, how would you describe Horace Pippin's post-war experiences in 1920s America? His rise as a celebrated folk artist changed his life. How did he

use that status to continue to address the effects of his war experience, and the racial prejudice he experienced upon his return to America following the war?

- One hundred years after the First World War, veterans are still using the arts to make sense of their war experiences. Compare and contrast the artwork of Claggett Wilson and the artwork of Jesse Albrecht. What themes do you find in their work? In what ways does their work address the stresses and traumas of war?
- The Joe Bonham Project is witness art. What does that mean, and why is it significant? How does a project like this bring new levels of awareness to civilian communities about the sacrifices made by those who serve in the military? By naming the project for a WWI doughboy that is the main character of a 1939 anti-war novel, do these images take on other kinds of signifiers? As community members what is our responsibility in the care and nurturing of our wounded warriors?

World War I and American Art – Exhibition



JOHN SINGER SARGENT

GASSED

1918

Oil on canvas

Full painting – 91 x 240 1/2 in.

Imperial War Museum

Claggett Wilson – U.S. Marine Corps

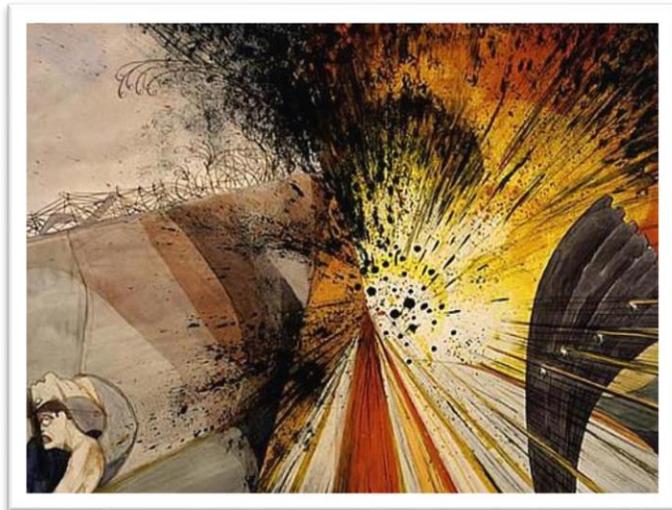
Before the First World War, **Claggett Wilson (1887-1952)** worked in New York City as a portraitist, muralist, designer–decorator, and as a costume and set designer. During the war he served as Brigade HQ chief in the 2nd (Indian Head) Division and later, because he spoke fluent French, as aide-de-camp to Brigadier General Wendell Neville in Germany. Wounded twice, Wilson never shook the debilitating effects of mustard gas. For his service he was awarded the Navy Cross, the Silver Star, and the Croix de Guerre, and ended his military career with the maple leaf of a Major. Following the war he created 26 watercolor paintings that captured his war experiences. In 1920 the watercolors were exhibited in New York City at three galleries, including the Whitney Studio Club (March 15th-24th), and the work brought him a recommendation for the Nobel Prize. The watercolors were then sent to France where color plates were printed by The Societe Anonyme Des Arts Graphiques, assembled into a limited edition portfolio, and published as *The War Paintings of Claggett Wilson* by J.H. Sears & Co., New York in 1928, with two essays of appreciation by the literary critic Alexander Wollcott and art critic Henry McBride.

1. First Lieutenant Claggett Wilson, France, 1918, website – <http://claggettwilson.com/greatwar.html>

2. *Flower of Death – The Bursting of a Heavy Shell – Not as It Looks, but as It Feels and Sounds and Smells* ca. 1919
Watercolor and Pencil on Paperboard



1.



2.



3.

It took more than ten years after the war had ended for disabled veteran and self-taught African-American Modernist painter **Horace Pippin (1888-1946)** to begin to artistically unpack his experiences as a soldier in France during World War I. Pippin had been a Colonel with the 15th New York Infantry, the legendary 369th Colored Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army Guard Division – soldiers that called themselves the Harlem Rattlers. The extraordinary efforts of the 369th won them the unique distinction of being the only unit during WWI to have continuously served at the front for over six months. After the war they were awarded the Croix de Guerre, France’s highest military honor. Just weeks before the Armistice was declared on November 11, 1918, Pippin was shot in the right shoulder by a German sniper. Pippin later recorded his harrowing war experiences in a diary written approximately two years after the war, and in the autobiography he wrote some time later in the 1920s. Pippin’s war experiences, his life after the war as a disabled veteran, and his rise from obscurity to the status of celebrated artist offers an interesting case study of the experiences of African-Americans who served during the First World War, race relations during the first quarter of the 20th c., and Pippin’s rise as a “folk artist” whose war experiences show up directly and obliquely in the artwork he produced from the 1920s through the 1940s.

1. Photo of Pippin and his wife Jennie
Chester County Historical Society,
West Chester, Pennsylvania

Horace Pippin – U.S. Army

1.



2.



3.



Citizen – Soldier – Citizen – Exhibition



SKIP ROHDE

LITTLE AFGHAN GIRL

2012

Pastel on Toned Paper

13 x 1 in.

Collection of the Artist

Jesse Albrecht – U.S. Army –Medic

Jesse Albrecht is an Iraq War veteran and university-trained ceramist and sculptor. He served as an Army medic with the Iowa National Guard in Iraq in 2003 and 2004. His unit was stationed in Mosul, where they lived in tents under the entryway to Saddam Hussein's palace. The chaos, brutality, and ambiguity of the war were unnerving for Albrecht, and he has been actively dealing with memories of his time in combat ever since. Albrecht uses his art training to both address the traumas of his own war experiences and to explore the culture of war and the military. His year in Mosul and the horrific devastation of Saddam's cruel and imperialistic dictatorship got under Albrecht's skin, and art making became one of the ways he displaced the charge of his military experience. Albrecht's determination to create an art practice that investigates the traumas of war is in part a result of the war stories he heard from relatives while growing up. Three generations of his family served in four different wars – World War I, World War II, Vietnam, and Iraq. His great-uncle, Everett DeMoss, was gassed while serving during the First World War, and afterwards was nearly always drunk. Such stories motivate Albrecht and inform the messages conveyed in his artwork about war.

1. Jesse Albrecht, photo for *The Art of War* exhibit, 2015, Josephy Center for Arts and Culture



1.



2.



3.

Michael D. Fay – U.S. Marine Corps

Michael D. Fay (1955 -) is a painter, illustrator, and retired chief warrant officer for the U. S. Marine Corps. Deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan as a Combat Artist, Fay was a part of the Marine Corps Combat Art Program begun during World War II under the guidance of Brigadier General Robert Denig, whose philosophy was: "At peace or at war, man cannot live by bread alone. A special case for art in time of war may be made, for it is then that man's spiritual, as well as physical, being is most severely in need of sustaining strength." Following the events of September 11, 2001, Fay was deployed four times, creating art in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bahrain, and Oman. "The Marine philosophy has always been, 'Go to war, do art. . . . This is not for propaganda purposes or to make posters.... [Y]ou are expected to go out with the troops and to make art from their experiences." When Fay retired from the Marine Corps he then founded the Joe Bonham Project in 2011.

1. Michael D. Fay at the opening reception for the *Arts and Stripes* exhibit, Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton, Virginia, July, 2011; photo by Tara Tappert.

2. *Lance Corporal Kyle Carpenter USMC*
2011
Graphite on Paper
Property of the Joe Bonham Project

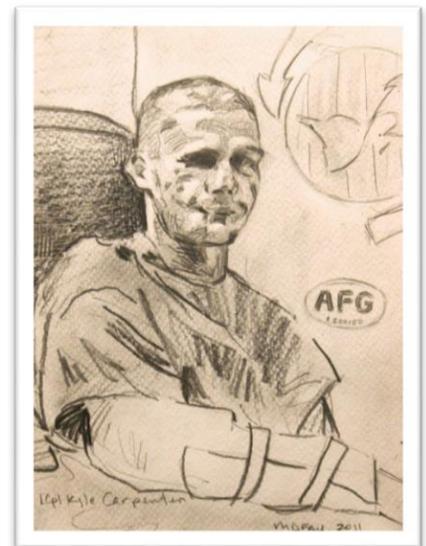
3. *Lance Cpl. Tyler Huffman USMC*
2011



1.



2.



3.

SELECTED RESOURCES:

WORLD WAR I

EXHIBITION

World War I and American Art – Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – November 4, 2016 – April 9, 2017 -- <https://www.pafa.org/WW1>. There will be a catalogue for this exhibition.

World War I and American Art is organized around eight themes: *Prelude: The Threat of War; Hartley and Hassam: Tenuous Neutrality; Debating the War; Mobilization; Modernists and the War; Battlefields; The Wounded and the Healers; and Celebration and Mourning*. Arranged to follow the narrative of the war itself, the exhibition will show how artists chronicled their experiences of the unfolding war as it crept closer to home and then involved them directly as soldiers, relief workers, political dissenters, and official war artists.

ARTISTS

Claggett Wilson – U.S. Marine Corps

Michael Barton, "War Art: Claggett Wilson," *Stand To! The Journal of The Western Front Association*, No. 85, (April/May, 2009): 16-20; available online at the following link, at the bottom of the page – <http://claggettwilson.com/greatwar.html#>

Claggett Wilson was an American artist who recorded his war experiences during the First World War. While a small collection of sketches have survived, it is the 26 watercolor paintings he made in 1919 after the war that most fully capture his experiences. This article chronicles Wilson's military service – he noted that "the Marines made him everything he was" – and links the things that happened to him to the subject matter of the watercolors he produced.

Horace Pippin – U.S. Army

Edward Puchner, "Winning the Peace Over *Mr. Prejudice*," in Audrey Lewis, ed., *Horace Pippin: The Way I See It*, ex. cat. (New York: Brandywine River Museum in association with Scala Arts Publishers, Inc., [2015], pp. 57-71.

As a devout Christian who was also a disabled African-American doughboy, the events of war and racial prejudices experienced by Horace Pippin are compellingly addressed in his WWII era painting, *Mr. Prejudice*, 1943. This exhibition catalogue essay not only analyzes the imagery of the painting, but also provides a detailed history of why each person and element is represented here. It also thematically links the religious undercurrents in *Mr. Prejudice* to the direct relationship between war, evil, equality, and racial prejudice captured in *Holy Mountain II*, painted one year later.

Additional suggested reading:

Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Suffering and Sunset: World War I in the Art and Life of Horace Pippin* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 552 pages.

For self-made artist and World War I soldier Horace Pippin—who served in the 369th African American infantry—war provided a formative experience that defined his life and work. His transformation of combat service into canvases and autobiographies whose emotive power, psychological depth, and haunting realism showed his view of the world revealed his prowess as a painter and writer. In *Suffering and Sunset*, Celeste-Marie Bernier painstakingly traces Pippin's life story of art as a life story of war. *Suffering and Sunset* illustrates Pippin's status as a groundbreaking African American painter who not only suffered from but also staged many artful resistances to racism in a white-dominated art world.

Horace Pippin Notebooks and Letters – ca. 1920, 1943 – Archives of American Art – <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/horace-pippin-notebooks-and-letters-8586/more>

The notebooks and letters of Horace Pippin in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2006. The papers have been scanned in their entirety, and total 114 images.

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WARS – TODAY

EXHIBITION

Tara Leigh Tappert, *Citizen – Soldier – Citizen*, ex. cat. (Michigan City, IN: Lubeznik Center for the Arts), November 2, 2013 – February 9, 2014 – This link takes you to the online catalogue – <http://www.lubeznikcenter.org/pdf/CSC-online-catalogue.pdf>

The genesis of *Citizen – Soldier – Citizen* was a desire to create an exhibition of contemporary artwork by veteran-artists who had mainly served in the American military post 9-11-2001. The exhibition draws upon a nation-wide network of veteran-artists who work in a variety of media – from painting, drawing, photography, and film, to fiber, clay, and wood. The exhibition includes two-dimensional wall art, as well as sculpture, installations, and books. Through the four themes of the exhibition – Record, React, Rehabilitate, and Remember – the artists tackle their military and combat experiences from multiple perspectives. There is political commentary, scenes of witness, storytelling about the death of comrades, brave exposure of traumatic events, elegiac views of war torn landscapes, depictions of the wounds of war, metaphors intended to challenge citizen complacency, and sweet and bittersweet memories.

ARTISTS

The Dirty Canteen

From the Dirty Canteen website – <http://www.dirtycanteen.com/>

The Dirty Canteen - In the military we were issued brand new canteens, but after many training exercises and deployments the canteens became worn, abused

and dirty. The Dirty Canteen is a metaphor for our involvements and experiences while in the military. We were soldiers and humanitarians and though we can no longer do so in uniform, we choose to continue this service to others by using the arts. We served in conflicts from Afghanistan, the Gulf War, and Iraq. There are nine members of the Dirty Canteen artist collective. All of which serve(d) honorably in the military and aim to raise awareness about issues veterans face while returning home from conflict. Our stories and work translate into conversations that try to bridge the gap between military and civilian cultures. This dialog hopes to bring understanding of how war and trauma not only affect members of the military, but our society as a whole. Our mission is not to promote a particular belief but to pose questions about the many difficult and genuine concerns the American community possesses about current and past military engagements. We wish to share our stories, artwork and message of peace and appreciate the opportunities to do so.

A documentary film – *Bonus Time* – chronicles the stories of four of the Dirty Canteen artists – <https://vimeo.com/153866816>

One artist from the Dirty Canteen is highlighted here:

Jesse Albrecht – U.S. Army – Medic

Tara Leigh Tappert, *Citizen – Soldier – Citizen*, ex. cat. (Michigan City, IN: Lubeznik Center for the Arts), November 2, 2013 – February 9, 2014, pp. 11-12 in the online catalogue –

<http://www.lubeznikcenter.org/pdf/CSC-online-catalogue.pdf>

and

Tara Leigh Tappert, *Healing Threads / Cathartic Clay: War, Trauma, and Art*, ex. cat. (Salina, KS: Salina Art Center) November 6, 2014 – February 1, 2015, pp. 42-77 in the online catalogue –

<http://drive.google.com/file/d/0B05TKPLxMrulVzFaSnUyZC1zTXM/view>

Jesse Albrecht uses his art training – he holds a BFA and MFA – to process his experiences as a combat medic in Iraq during the first years of the war. He has found many outlets for artmaking, including Veterans Book Project, Combat Paper Project, Paintallica, and The Dirty Canteen. Albrecht is a professional artist who is focusing his work on military culture, and the traumatic effects of war on those who experience it.

Michael D. Fay – U.S. Marine Corps – Combat Artist

The Joe Bonham Project

Michael D. Fay, "Still in the Fight: A New Reality", *New York Times*, March 15, 2011 – available online at this link – <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/15/still-in-the-fight-a-new-reality/#more-82860> in th

Retired Marine Corps combat artist, and founder of The Joe Bonham Project describes his experiences of portraying military servicemen who have been critically wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Carol Kino, "Portraits of War", *New York Times*, May 25, 2012 – available online at this link – <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/27/arts/design/joe-bonham-project-illustrates-the-wounds-of-war.html>

The faces sketched or painted as part of the Joe Bonham Project collection are more than just portraits on paper and canvas. The project, inspired in part by Joe Bonham, the central character in Dalton Trumbo's hard-hitting 1939 anti-war novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*, was founded in 2011 by Michael D. Fay, a former U.S. Marine Corps combat artist. Fellow artists, many affiliated with the Society of American Illustrators in New York City, also participated in the project. These artists visited military hospitals – such as Walter Reed in Bethesda, Maryland – and produced a collection of narrative illustrations of faces that tell the poignant stories of wounded service members. The images and the stories capture the uncomfortable realities of the current wars.

Additional suggested reading:

Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun* (New York: L. Stuart [1970, ca. 1959], originally published, 1939, 309 pages.

An immediate bestseller upon its original publication in 1939, Dalton Trumbo's stark, profoundly troubling masterpiece about the horrors of World War I brilliantly crystallized the uncompromising brutality of war and became the most influential protest novel. This work continues to rivet readers with its story of an American youth who survives World War I as an armless, legless, and faceless basket case with his mind intact.