



SUIT

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The following are a series of interviews conducted between June to August 2014. The intention was to explore the structures of military practice versus the fluidity of creative action.

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SOLDIERS TURNED ARTISTS

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SOLDIERS
TURNED
ARTISTS



JACKO

From the early nineties to the early noughties Jacko (Mark Jackson) formed a career out of military service. He joined the 3rd Battalion, the Parachute regiment, and served in Kosovo in 1999 with the elite Pathfinder Platoon. He was also deployed in Sierra Leone and Iraq near to the end of his military career. He left and went to Charles Cecil Art Studios, first focusing on painting and then later on sculpture. He now has a studio based in Swindon where he continues his creative practice.

Why did you join the armed services?

When I was leaving school I felt generally schizophrenic because I had two interests, which were going in completely different directions – art and soldiering.

I was very aware that my creative practice was a real passion for me but equally I was interested in the challenges that soldiering presented.

I knew that these interests were going in very different directions and even though I had an opportunity to take up a fine art degree I couldn't make sense of doing it, it just seemed crazy to do that and so I decided to go straight into the army and followed that direction for nearly a decade. Knowing sort of consciously that at a later stage I would follow my equal passion of being an artist.

I started my service in the early nineties, when there was a lot of change happening; a new Labour party was coming into power, Tony Blair had a policy of intervention, he was using many parts of the world on humanitarian driven missions and we had this escalation of deployment from West Africa and just towards the end of my time after 9/11 we were focused on Iraq, so the last summer of my army service was the Gulf War in 2003. At that point I had already planned to leave and had identified a art school that I wanted to study in Florence.

Did the discipline of working in that environment help when you decided to become an artist?

I wish it did more but what I've found since is the discipline that I was able to work with was very much an external thing but my discipline now, my working routine, in an interior environment, probably leaves a lot to be desired.

I tend to have big lulls between commissions, which means that I just get on with other things in life and then once the work comes in I'll focus on one job and I'll be at it all hours of the day and night, so it's a discipline of sorts but not a routine.

When I was a soldier I relied on people to keep me disciplined; they'd let me know if I was slipping. Often I'd be found with a pencil or on the rare occasion a paintbrush and be told that I was being too artistic, so I was helped to focus and be disciplined by the people I surrounded myself with. On the flip side of this when I eventually went to art school I was told that I was too military in my work ethic; discipline depends on the context.

There's a transitional period that I think all soldiers go through when leaving the army but mine has been longer than originally anticipated as I was leaving to go into a creative environment.

I knew life would be different and I was very much drawn towards that but the transition in terms of approach and mind set took a while to adjust to, due to the fact that you're using the other side of your brain - certainly in painting. In sculpture it's a bit different as there's a real practical element to it, you get involved in engineering and the process isn't purely expressive, it's more measured and structured.



Was your time as a soldier rewarding?

Yes, absolutely. At different levels of intensity there would be days, weeks, months where it would be hard graft. There are bits, which are only enjoyable on masochistic levels that we all have in terms of challenge.

Whatever you're doing, whatever the soldiering might entail at any given time there's a huge human element to it which is consistent and that's where I drew a lot of the reward from and then there are times when the reward comes from a more obvious place. For example, In part of West Africa, where a small number of us were deployed, a series of us were able to stop a civil war, which had been running on for the best part of a decade. To help build peace and effect the foundations of the populations future is a deeply rewarding experience. Equally, there are things that are less rewarding on a personal level but at the end of the day your serving a country and you have to carry out their commands on a daily basis, so you get on with it. Even though my time serving was a complex, rewarding experience I knew that as time went on that I was working towards something else, simmering down on my serving duties and bringing my creative ambitions to the boil.

At the same time it was a big call to make as well – a big change. Luckily I was able to rationalise and think about this change over a period of time, so that by the time I decided to leave, I was all over it.



Why did you decide to go to art school in Florence?

It just happened to be a school I recognised early on. I found an article and had just tucked it away and then I had to rifle through a box of old papers to find it again and was starting to think seriously about doing it. The school (Charles Cecil Studio's) was set up by a pair of Americans who wanted to immerse themselves in the world of fine art/figurative paintings and to be surrounded by an environment that had such a history of this type of art.

Somewhere they could paint, somewhere they could study and somewhere they could teach as well. Florence is such a centre for that sort of art spectrum and at the time for the training that I wanted to put myself through it wasn't offered in the British Isles; so going to Florence was because I had identified the school and knew that it was where I wanted to be.

What prompted the change from print to sculpture?

My bread and butter now is sculpture but before art school I never really thought about working within that medium.

I could appreciate the aesthetic but it wasn't until the second year of my time at art school where it was offered as a broadening of my education that I started to take it seriously.

I knew that I loved the process of sculpture and therefore I pursued that more, but it was only offered as a temporary part of my painting training. I was at Florence for two years focusing on drawing and painting, I then had to come back to the UK for a couple of years and then decided to go back to Florence to concentrate on sculpture.

What prompted the change was probably due to the hands on, tactile nature of sculpture. Essentially it's pushing around mud, this process just seemed more of a natural fit to me.

Is the process physically demanding?

It can be, if you're working on a large piece to start with when you have to mass in all of the clay and you're up and down the ladder and the clay weighs 25kg and you're slapping quite a lot of it on at one point.

Once the clay is on you're just really working with the detail and adjusting things so then it becomes less physically demanding but that initial week of physically getting half a tonne of clay onto the armature – the supporting skeleton, yes it's a physical job, but that's a side to it that I like and think most sculptors like to.

With the larger pieces there's a large project management side to it. Working with subcontractors, landscape architects, foundry workers, stone masons and sometimes steel engineers. One of the projects I had to physically get a team of tree surgeons and cut the trees down 10 miles away so that the bronze on the back of a lorry could get onto a dual carriageway. There are a lot of these practical challenges.

Is there a typical process, which you follow?

On the larger projects they are more generic on theme. I have a dialogue with the commissioner who may have already pushed out a detailed brief and just talk about what they envisage and what they want. For those who don't have a 'artistic language' but who are commissioning it's quite a challenge. I used to ask the commissioner for one short sentence or even one word the focus of what they want to achieve.

For the Parachute Regiment Memorial it was 'readiness' and so you get a foundation of one over-riding value or emotion, which will then inform the whole project.

That's in terms of dialogue and then there's exploring the actual design. I always start with a model to draw, draw the pose, adjust the pose subtly, or completely on some occasions, and come up with drawings, working from the live model and discuss those and give the commissioner a selection.

As you change the pose subtly in different measures and on the general idea that can be where you're artistic input is. Moving on from that, there's the smaller version of the sculpture, the Maquette, which you use to explore the piece, while producing something physical, which the commissioner can see – you can discuss the design elements on a small scale. It always works better on a smaller scale and so you can have a dialogue to inform the process through the Maquette.

So that by the time you start the large piece a lot of the gestures of the pose, a lot of the clothing of the equipment has already been agreed upon. The idea is to have a progressive process so by the time you're on the big one you're making that one as good as possible because you've prepared in advance enough so that all you then need to do is sculpt. But also through that process you're focusing on the design by producing drawings, to try to find the best fit that you've been asked to do.

Producing the large one would probably lead to something generic, that is why time is a factor, time of exploring ideas – trying to make the 3 dimensionality work at all angles, it all leads in.







**Do you think you would of still been an artist
if you hadn't of joined the army?**

Yes. But I don't think I could have and I don't know if I could stick at it, because it's a slightly ethereal working life, with no particular structure or guidelines – it's a life you make up for yourself. You have successes and challenges. For me as a person to know for my twenties that I served a selfless role, for the service of others and for the country - I have that tucked away. If I had been an artist straight away, being the type of person who was drawn to that sort of service and reaping the rewards I don't know, I think it would have unravelled at some point.

When I say I don't think I could of physically of done it I remember turning up to art school aged 30 having left the army and having worked alongside people who were school leavers who I felt were more talented than me and seen their application, seeing their vigorous foundation to training, spending two or three weeks just on a charcoal drawing on just a plaster cast, not even a real human being, that takes a lot of patience. I remember there, aged 30 just looking at some of the others and saying 'I wouldn't be able to of done this when I was 18' I was to impatient, I don't think I would have had that focus, I would of loved the idea of it, but I had to run around for a bit. I had to grow up.



GARY BENNETT

Gary Bennett started and finished his military career in the eighties, training in Woolwich Barracks and Lark Hill. Later deployed in Germany and Ireland. He is now the official war artist for the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association.

Some of the serviceman who came back from the Falkland's war were badly injured and needed protection. The nurses were stretched and so we'd help them with jobs such as changing wounds, bedpans and talking to these men, knowing that I was an artist these guys would ask me to do drawings for them. The times when I was in the army it was pre media, I was lucky enough to have a photographic memory of atmosphere and these guys would recall situations to me and I would make illustrations for them and ask what they thought was right and what was wrong and adjust the drawings according to their preferences.

I've always been drawn to creativity and the history of art, it always nagged at me but at that time it was important that I joined the military because it offered me experience, education and good friends, which is something I didn't have when living in my home environment. I felt that joining would make me employable because my experience would show to an employer that I would be able to work in stressful situations and be capable of getting on with the job at hand. The after effects of being in that climate of combat gave me a certain confidence, it didn't give me any fear about anything, I don't know if that's a good thing or not. I could move forward with what it was that I wanted pretty sharply, it made me think that I could tackle the world.



The draw to war is often the danger, you can become addicted to that excitement and a lot of people really like that feeling. I've always craved a bit of danger, as a soldier you're trained to be in control and you're the most in control you've been in your life – things are happening very fast, but you stay very calm and you can deal with it very well because of the training, it's only after when you're on a massive high that it becomes dangerous, as it can overwhelm you and give you a level of excitement that you want to repeat over and over.

When I started my training I was able to strip down weapons and build them back up quickly, I joined a regiment that allowed me to be near big machinery, big guns and exciting things like that. Fortunately for me when I finished my service I had a family to look after which kept my feet firmly on the ground. But for some people when they return from combat they can get into trouble because they find it difficult to fill that void, that excitement, if you're smart you can catch on that these are normal human urges that have developed and can be changed.

I decided to study art as a hobby. I was traditional in my approach and after a while, I felt that I needed to be pushed so I started to look at more contemporary art looking at artists such as Damien Hirst and wonder what that type of art was all about, what is the shark in Formaldehyde? I needed to be challenged and even though that type of work doesn't fit me I began to study and practice and that's where the curtains were drawn back and I realised what it was all about.



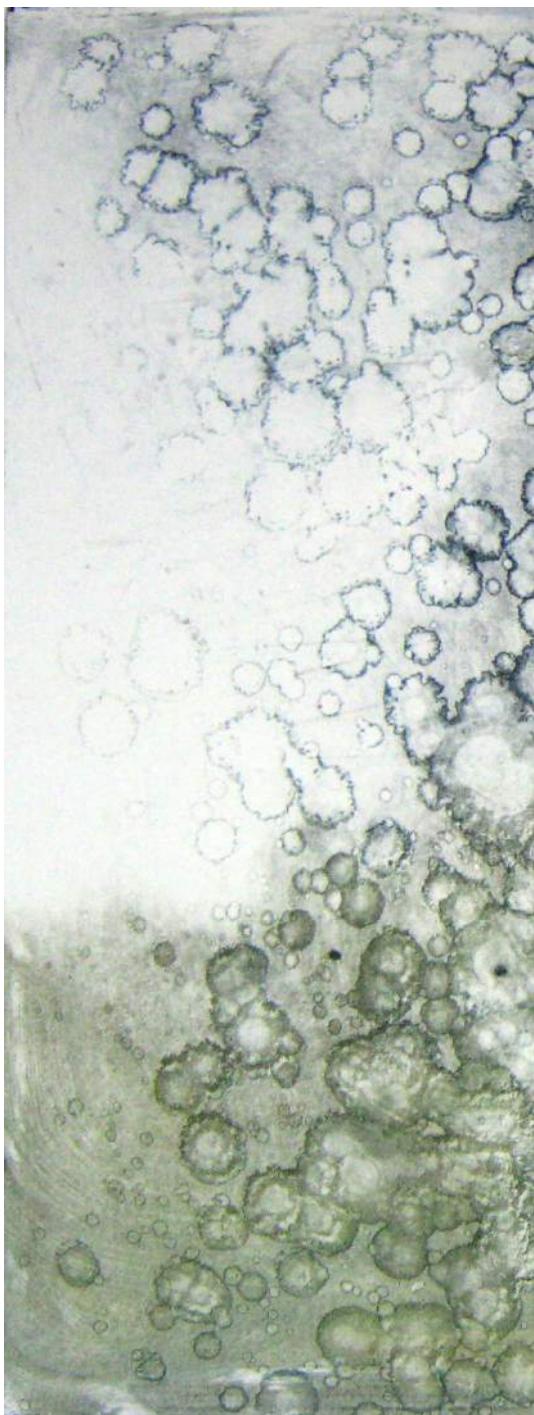
Within my work I start of writing and drawing, adding emotion into the work by layering it with memories. The work is often emotive, heavy and full of dread with a certain dramatic heft.

I had an exhibition opening where a lady came up to me and said that my paintings made her cry, one that depicted conscripts looking like X-Rays, a representation from the tests for Britain's hydrogen bomb in 1957-58.

That particular piece came along after I had interviewed conscripts about the Atom Testing on Christmas Island. They had put their hands through their eyes and could see the bones in their hands. These young boys would build runways for aircrafts, when the first bomb dropped these kids just fell to their knees and began to cry, they thought they had ended the earth and thought they had destroyed everything they knew. They were in floods of tears begged god for forgiveness and you must remember that this was at a time when people weren't educated the way they are now, their knowledge was limited. So even when the fourth and fifth bomb dropped they were still as terrified and shook to the core as they were when the first drop happened as it was something they hadn't been educated on, they had thought the earth had been poisoned.

The piece that I created to examine this event moved a few people who saw the work, which shocked me at the time, I didn't know my work could have that kind of impact.

I am interested in getting an emotion down on paper and not compromising on that vision. It's a process of going through the situation and dealing with these narratives which can be hard work, when I feel drained from the process then I know the piece is complete.







Douglas Fullerton 2013



Douglas Fullerton

DOUG FARTHING

Doug Farthing was a sergeant major in 2 Para and was part of the operations around Kabul in 2002. He's also been deployed in Northern Ireland, Iraq, Afghanistan and The Falkland's. Doug has just recently won a scholarship for the Prince's Drawing School in London which he starts in September 2014.

I'm always drawn back to that piece of ground, that unseen danger, where there may be an enemy sniper hiding. That piece of landscape becomes a battlefield and I place myself down like a soldier, so I won't stand there and paint, I'll sit down and in some cases lay down on the floor and get a different perspective as a soldier looks through it, and that's useful, and it's good for the viewer, because all of a sudden there looking at something as how a soldier would look at it, 'where is that sniper sitting' it's in the way I think, the way most soldiers think. You walk past a wood and the first thing you think is 'where is the best place to put my observation post?' it's completely barking. Why would I be thinking that on a Sunday afternoon with my family but that's what soldiers are like, thinking of escape routes of areas where they are going to fight the enemy - it's mad.

When I was sixteen I was very energetic and needed something to soak up that energy and so I enlisted into what was then called the Junior Service Army. I was trained as a junior power and then moved onto my adult training which lasted four and a half months. I was treated like a soldier from the get go which could be quite overwhelming but once I got through the training and understood it all, then it was a great experience both physically and mentally.

I was good at art as a kid and I was good at physical activities but I shelved the art when I joined the army for a few years. I didn't go near the art again until I was 22 years old and I remember that because that's when I thought about getting married and as soon as I got married at 23 years old I started practising again. I took diaries and a little watercolour set when I went abroad to Northern Ireland, Iraq, Afghanistan and The Falkland's. As I was becoming more aware of my ability I started to take oils with me and would try to paint on scene, onto an ammunition box or something like that using the medium that I thought was best for it. There's a lot of time to spare so I spent my time drawing and painting there was no conscious action of me believing I was an artist, I was just recording events around me. I have a tendency to work on materials found in the places we were operating in so for instance if I

was in Iraq I would find an ammunitions box, thinking more like an artist trying to work on something embroiled on that environment and then I'd paint an image on top of it in the open air. These pieces have now become collectable for people and national museums which is great.

Towards the last ten years Afghanistan has become very interesting to trained artists who want to attach themselves to units to paint, and I've met a few of them. They did interest me because I was interested in the fact that they were an artist going out to a military environment and have a level of success from it, either financially or be it establishing themselves as a war artist.

It made me think that it could be something I could do in the future even though now I still don't model myself as a war artist, I wouldn't put myself into that category.

I see myself as an artist first, it's just that my subject matter is war because I've been a soldier, that's the difference. Artists who go to war want to establish themselves as a war artist for that particular operation but I don't see it to be that important to me because I know the soldiering is in me, it's in my blood.





ESTHER

RICHARD SALTER

Richard Salter has served over 17 years in the British Army, he studied fine art at the Buckinghamshire University and has painted throughout his military career whether on operations, training or at home.

Why did you decide to join the British army?

I grew up on a typical Council estate in Selby, North Yorkshire. I was under travelled and felt like a bird in a cage, I had a huge thirst for life and hadn't had the opportunity to travel and had great motivation to do something with my life.

Seeing the Army as an escape I joined aged 16 as a Telecommunications Technician in the Royal Signals. Looking back I think I had a strong creative side of the brain and the Army discipline and engineering training improved my logical; black and white side.

I think you can see the battle between the two sides in my work. The logical side tends to stop the creative side running wild.

Was your time serving a strong and rewarding experience?

The Army has some of the biggest physical challenges anyone could face, however we face them as a team. When I paint it's an individual exploration with more mental challenges than physical.

What do you try to capture in your paintings?

The journey of my paintings starts with an initial thought, which could be as simple as an emotion I have felt following an event. So my paintings tend to tell my story through my experiences. One of the most exciting moments for me is listening to the viewer's own interpretation of my work; I know I have conveyed my idea accurately when it can be read as intended...but it's also fun to hear a fresh take on the work even if it has a different meaning. That's one of the great things about Art; each person brings their own personality and past experiences that will react with the work in a different way.



Did the discipline of working in a demanding environment help at all when establishing yourself as an artist?

Art is a different sort of demanding. They say a little pain is good for the soul, and for me it helps charge my emotions which I let through into my work when I'm in the zone that channels it. I think viewers relate to my work very well as I have a clear and honest story, I paint from my heart and believe that is when I create my best work.

How do other soldiers react to your work?

The Army is such a masculine affair compared with the throwing paint around in a creative way, so initially I got some stick in a fun way. However once they saw my work I had commissions lining up which gave me hours and hours of practice....which I believe is essential to success. To be top of the game in anything in life you must put the hours in.



How has it been, exhibiting with the armed forces art society? (The armed force art society exhibits work of serving soldiers and veterans.)

The AFAS is a great place to meet people with two common interests, the Forces Life and Art. Most members are retired and we are currently trying to boost the numbers with fresh young talent, but it is a rare thing in the Forces. I find for most it's a hobby that is picked up on retirement which is a shame.

Is there any war artists who have influenced your practice?

I had the opportunity to meet Professor Ken Howard RA who presented me with a Serving War Artist award last year. Ken served with the Royal Marines and admits he was a better soldier than a painter. In a speech he gave after he said "For me Art is about "Revelation", a way of seeing, "Celebration", saying something about one's life and work and "Communication", speaking to people directly in visual terms". I found these words true and very inspiring!



SOLDIERS
TURNED
PHOTOJOURNALISTS



SEAN WALKER

Sean joined the the British military unit, the Parachute Regiment, before going on to become a member of the Pathfinder Platoon, where he deployed into a number of conflict zones in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.



Why did you decide to join the Parachute Regiment?

Coming from a working class area of Manchester, and being lumbered with a less-than academic mind, had led me to believe that options to break away from the predestined 9-5 treadmill were few and far between. The military was in a period of relative inactivity when I left school, with the north of Ireland being the only likely hotspot, so deciding to join the Army was seen as quite a good escape route.

My only self-imposed proviso was that it had to be with the toughest unit, hence the reason I opted for the Parachute Regiment, and later the Pathfinder's.

Was it a strong and rewarding experience and did the difficulties of working in such a demanding environment come with a lot of challenges?

My military career was made up of a series of highs and lows, challenges and rewards. You willingly throw yourself into difficulty and harms way with the sole purpose of seeing how you will fare. During the Pathfinder Platoon selection I toiled alone over the mountains of the Brecon Beacons, day after day, rarely getting any sense of elation, but within a few months I was standing at 18,000 feet on the tailgate of a C-130 aircraft, about to HALO parachute into the inky blackness of the night, thinking I was some- sort of Mancunian, James Bond-type figure. Those were hard, but fun times.

The most difficult aspect of the job is the loss of friends. Confronting danger and overcoming your fears are aspects to the job and you will spend much of your time living with a mindset that you, and your peers, are impervious to harm. When you are faced with a death, your are suddenly confronted with your own mortality.

Did the discipline of working in that environment help when moving forward in your career in covering conflicts in media and photojournalism?

Yes. Many of the skills I learned in my previous career could be brought to bear as both a media advisor and a photographer. When operating as a media advisor, assisting news agencies in conflict zones, your role is very much there to support the

journalist in harsh, frontline conditions, that may be completely alien to them. My role is to ensure that they carry out their journalistic aspirations whilst not falling prey to their own naivety. That said, there is always the chance of 'Murphy's Law' coming in to play.

As a photographer, you can always draw on traits such as patience, looking for the minutiae that others may miss. One thing that needs to be stemmed is the willingness to throw yourself headlong in the fray when things erupt. Many photographers point out how the process of looking down the viewfinder can give the impression that you are somehow separated from the danger, protected by an invisible force. This is another thing that we have to be mindful off in conflict zones.

What factors lead to your change in your career? I have read that you were serving in the Pathfinder Platoon and then moved to working in media. Was it a smooth and conscious decision to move into photojournalism or was it a leap into a new territory which you had to learn to react to?

It was a very easy process, in all honesty. I had been in the military for 12 years and ticked all the boxes but there was a point where I need to look for another line of work. The 'War on Terror' was the starting pistol for many soldiers to leave as the emergence of the PMC's (Private Military Companies) in Iraq and Afghanistan became an ever increasingly attractive option. For many, the 'Queen's Shilling' paled when compared to the wages that were on offer, but for me it was very much seen as a halfway house until I could find a job that would stimulate me.

Upon leaving the Pathfinder's I was back in Iraq and shortly after that I was assigned to work alongside CNN at their Baghdad bureau. That was my first encounter with the news/media and I soon developed a respect for their passion to get the story and their willingness to seek out danger in an effort to show the world the hardship that the innocent people of that country was going though. It wasn't long before I decided that their may be a long term role for me alongside these types of people.



What is your aim as a photojournalist?

Without trying to sound like a cliché, I think it is to shine a light on a topic, to give a voice to a people and to document topics which you are passionate about. One the wonderful aspects of this internet age that we are in is that almost everyone has the ability to partake and do the same. Instagram, Podcast's, blogging and YouTube, can give the masses a voice.

There are fantastic photojournalists out there like Don McCullin that have said that they have reflected on their years of toil only to come to the conclusion that their efforts to change peoples minds had been in vain. I can sympathise with that, but that doesn't stop throngs of men and women following in Don's footsteps.

What do you try to capture in your photographs? Is it different for the situation you are embedded in, or is there a perspective, or rather theme, which you try to capture?

It depends on case to case. Many is the time that I will go to a location or country without an agenda and just see what I encounter but that stems from not wanting to pigeonhole myself into a set genre of photography. If I take a portrait, I am looking for a connection with the person. You can have that, through the lens, with a person whose language you do not speak. Those are the priceless moments.

My other interests are dispelling myths, shattering stereotypes and showing the truth. Far too often you can venture to a place and before you have even left the arrivals lounge you know that much of what you have been told about a land and its people is not true.





Is there restrictions as to what it is your allowed to photograph in certain situations? And if so, how do you overcome them to capture what it is you think is important to photograph.

Yes. The first place I went where it was a big issue was Marrakech. I arrived on a something of a whim and it wasn't long before I had failed to apply the rules which I often suggest to others, and that is to research. Especially when it comes to understanding cultural sensitivities. Many people I encountered were unenamored with the sight of a camera being pointed at them, especially when taking a candid shot. In that case, you just have to work with what you have got, but one of my main priorities is not to become a person that provokes hostility. I want to stay within the shadows.

On the flip-side, there was a time when I was in Afghanistan and took a series of photos of a lady, which was part of a project I was undertaking that was focused on patients at the medical rehabilitation facility. That normally would be a considered taboo, but without pressure or cajoling, I was permitted to take the shots.

You must of collected hundreds of different stories and perspectives while travelling and living in different cultures. Is there any examples you can share which highlight the dangers of living as a photojournalist?

I have never been in a situation where I was actually targeted, but just due to the nature of the locations I was in, and being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

On Baghdad's infamous 'Route Irish' (The main road connecting the International Airport and the 'Green Zone') caught in the crossfire between Iraqi troops and militant fighters. On another occasion, on the same road, I was in close proximity to IED going off. There was also the time that my car was shot at by a US military convoy despite following all the rules of the road, but that didn't stop two bullets hitting my window and another hitting the radiator. Fortunately for me, I happened to be travelling in an bulletproof car on that occasion.

These are just a few examples of what I have faced and all come back to bad timing on the

day. I have, however, been in the company of people that have gotten themselves into difficult situations due to a lack of awareness, complacency, or stretch their luck a little too far. One of the big problems spending long periods of time in any location is that you can start to become blind to the dangers that you may face. The attack on the Taverne du Liban, a popular restaurant with expats in Kabul is one such example. Whilst I am not saying that we have operate as cloistered nuns and monks, we do have to live our lives in these places with a sense of mindfulness.

What do you think the future of photojournalism holds? With the free information the public receive from the internet, is it a risk to yours and other photojournalists practice, or is it a challenge which has possibilities to work in different and interesting ways?

The internet, social media and digital devices have brought about pluses and minuses for people operating in all aspects of newsgathering. The positives are that the speed with which an image can be taken and then distributed to the world has never been faster. The negative is that the internet has brought about the death of many publications and the internet is awash with free images that are deemed suitable for most news organisations.

There is always going to be a requirement for a story to be told and I have no fear that photos will maintain to be one of the ways to do that. What photographers may have to do is embrace new technology and become more adept at using those stills in a multimedia format. The appetite for news agencies to spend money is diminishing, at all levels, and so adapting to this new medium is a must.

What current projects are your working on?

I have a number of projects that I am looking at. I have recently moved to Atlanta, in the United States, and one of the things that struck me was the religious diversity. I have always had a fascination with religions, having considered becoming a Priest at an early age, and now I plan to look at this diversity in an area what is commonly known as the 'Bible Belt' and show that Krishna, Buddha and Allah have all got homes in the 'Deep South'.





MATTHEW ELLIOTT

Matthew Elliott served as a royal marine for most of his career, on leave he studied photography at Plymouth College of Art.

Why did you decide to become a marine?

I joined the Marines at a young age looking for something mentally and physically challenging. I remember watching a programme about Marine training and knew it was for me. Mum wasn't too happy about me joining even though my dad served in the Navy for nearly 30 years, I think her concerns were regarding the amount of time Marines spend on the Frontline. As simple as it sounds, at that age I guess I was also looking for adventure.

Was your time spent as a Marine a rewarding experience?

Looking back on my time served training was the tough part, very few make it and you have to be a certain type of person to pass-out as a fully qualified Marine. It's not so much a career but an existence. As a serving Marine you rely on the 'brotherhood' and those you serve with. Recently Sebastian Junger presented a Ted Talk focusing on why 'we' miss conflict. This made total sense to me and he summed it up perfectly; it's not so much the conflict you miss but the men you serve with. There are very few situations nowadays where men can get so close and form those sort of bonds, the rules are different, the humour and the dynamics are like nothing you'll find in Civvy street.

Did the discipline of working in that environment help when moving forward in your career in photography?

Most definitely yes. During my degree I have achieved more than I could have wished for and this was down to passion and hard work. I am a mature student and have grown to be confident with putting myself forward. Some students want to develop their documentary work but are concerned with 'upsetting' the subjects they are working with or want to work with. I understand that everyone has different life experiences but sometimes you want to have a few quiet words with certain people when you hear them complaining about deadlines or the fact they are 'feeling a bit tired'.



What factors lead to your change in your career?

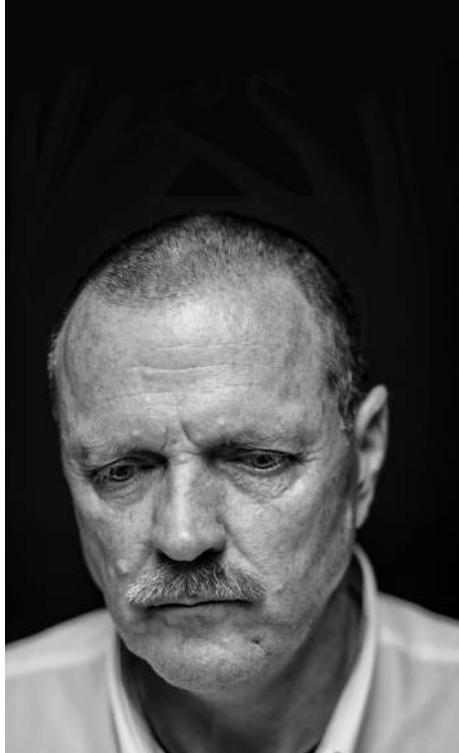
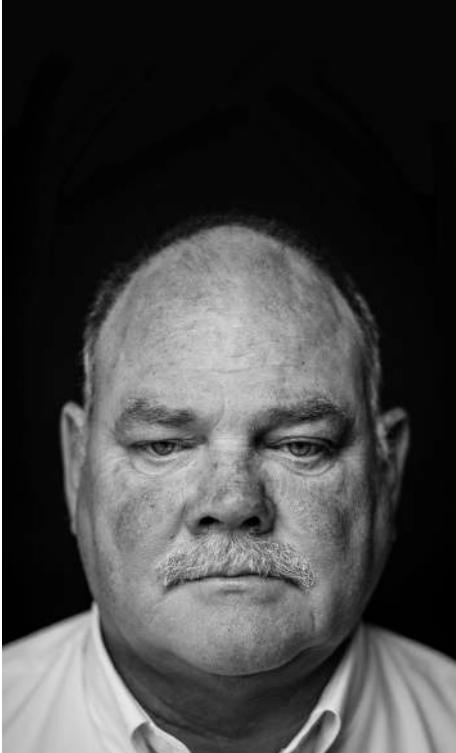
I was injured in the Marines, but not to the point where I was out of action, it was more a case of knowing my limits now. After the birth of my children, they are now 6 and 7, I picked up a camera to document their growth, as most parents probably do. From this point on I was hooked and intrinsically knew I had to take this further. At times though it feels like I have exchanged a rifle for a DSLR, during conflict you have a 'heightened state of awareness' which allows you to react, I like to feel I have adopted this within my photography. Knowing what I know now I only wish I had taken-up photography at a young age, there have been missed opportunities to document what I have seen, and the places I have been to, hindsight is a wonderful thing.



When I've listened and read other photojournalists working in conflict situations, some have noted that they actually don't care about photography, what they care about is communicating their narratives to an audience unaware of their stories. I wonder if this is true and a motivation for you as well.

From what I have seen the 'world' is getting too hung up on image manipulation and post-production. I have stripped my photography back to basics and capture in camera, with little or no post-production. If you view Tim Hetherington's 'Sleeping Soldiers' the intent, I feel, is plain to see. Full of narrative showing the young and vulnerable Marines living in extreme circumstances, yet you also get Tim's narrative, the photographer who has embedded with, and grown attached to, the subjects he portrays. Don McCullin and Phillip Jones Griffiths were also masters of this, it's not just a case of capturing that single image, but showing how dedicated you are as a practitioner.

Recently Robert Capa's famous D-Day beach landing images have been shown a lot in the press after the 70th anniversary. Yes, they were shot on film under extreme circumstances, they are under/over exposed and not in focus, but the narrative far outweighs the 'need' for technical perfection. This isn't to say Capa wasn't an exceptional photographer, far from it; these few images, for me, captured something only a few will ever really understand and the rest of us can only ever imagine.



Could you tell us about what motivated you to produce your current body of work – PTSD a portrait?

After completing 'State of Mind', a documentary study into Marine training, I wanted to deploy to Afghanistan, as part of my academic studies. After careful planning and proposal writing this didn't happen because of timing and funding. I wanted to work with a relevant subject, and after prolonged conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan it is well documented how a lot of service personnel have been affected by the illness which is only set to get worse in the future. I personally found it hard going adjusting to civilian life, and I know a lot of friends who have also suffered. My concept was to look at the bigger picture and not just the individual.

How has this body of work been received by viewers?

After doing so well with my FD Photography last year I was told to challenge myself on my BA, which is why I chose two pathways of work, image based and multimedia productions which go to support each other. My concern was how I had to learn a whole new skill-set in such a short space of time, keeping in mind this was my last year of studies on my BA. I'm happy to say the work so far has been well received. Those, who were involved with the work at a physical level, have been highly positive about it, and now they have viewed the end production fully understand what it is I wanted to achieve. It's not always easy explaining your motivation to those who don't fully understand photography, I think we take it for granted these days that the photographer is 'just' image making.



The portraits you capture offer intimate representations of individuals subjected to the environment they are in. Are these individuals eager to have their portrait taken, or is it more of a difficult task? If so, is it important to direct them in the most appropriate way, or is it more about trying to make them feel comfortable in front of the camera to get the most accurate/natural representation possible?

This work took some time to produce. I was fortunate with my service background as there had to be an initial element of trust, but knew I would have to tread lightly. Some of the subjects I had to meet with several times before I even removed my lens cap, but I ensured them the work I wanted to produce would be positive for all involved. What I don't like to do is 'over' direct. I am happiest when I work objectively, however for my final portraits I wanted a cohesive body of work which I would be happy to exhibit. I guess I wanted the viewer to be able to see something about the person, on an emotional level, without the use of additional signifiers.

Over the last few months I have spoken to a lot of PTSD sufferers, sadly most still feel unable to confront the illness head-on and would rather remain anonymous, however I was never going to ask anyone to be involved with the work if they weren't totally comfortable doing so.

Looking back, now I have been asked this question, I would like to show those final portraits to someone who knows nothing about the work, or the narrative, and see what, if anything, they take away from the work. It would be interesting feedback I'm sure.



SEAN POWER

Sean Power was a heavy weapons operator serving operational tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Once with 45 commando in Arbroath, twice with 40 commando in Taunton and once with Armoured Support company in Bovington.

Could we start with a bit about your background, why did you decide to join the armed forces?

I decided at 12 years old that I wanted to join the Marines. I was down at my Granddad's place in Cornwall and one day I helped him clear out his loft. Going through everything I came across a comic book annual called Valiant, about Commandos in WW2 running around and smashing the Germans. I decided I wanted some of that.

Was it a strong and rewarding experience?

It was very rewarding. The sense of achievement you feel at having joined a unit with such a long and proud history, and the toughness of the training to get in, is a real feeling of accomplishment. It was very challenging, both physically and mentally. You are often pushing your body to limits you wouldn't have thought possible. You are dealing with sleep deprivation, carrying loads sometimes of over 100lbs, whilst all the time ensuring you are carrying out your drills properly and to the best of your ability. And then there is the challenge of pulling the trigger. There is no bigger decision you can make in life, nothing more important, you have to have the mental maturity to know when the right time to squeeze off that round.

How do the other soldiers react to you taking their photos?

Being ex-military I find the guys trust me a bit more than if I weren't. I speak the same language as they do, I have the same stories. On one embed with a writer the guys would come up to me and ask if they could trust him, trust in me being almost implied by my background. Having been one of the guys though made me sensitive to when I shouldn't take a photo. I remember when I was serving and there were photographers about, and I remember what pissed me off about them and what didn't. I think generally though people are happy to have their photo taken, they sometimes are a bit distrustful of the stories that might come out, but they know the importance of telling the real story. If you can win their confidence early on, you're fine.











What made you take the leap to focus on photography?

I had been interested in photography ever since taking it as a class in school. I chose it as a subject because I thought it would be an easy class, but ended up really enjoying it. I joined the Marines and still liked taking pictures for fun, but I never saw a career in it until a couple of guys from The Times embedded with us for ten days in Afghanistan. Speaking to them and listening to their stories I decided I wanted a bit of that.

Do you have any examples of the dangers you come across as a photojournalist?

You just have to look at Syria to see the dangers of working as a photojournalist these days. If you're embedded on the front line with troops in contact you take the same risks they take; bullets and bombs don't discriminate. But these days the risk is more than that. The hype that accompanies the death or capture of a journalist is PR gold for some of these organisations, so journalists are now finding themselves actually targeted because of their job. Before in Afghan or Iraq, journalists wore blue to distinguish themselves from combatants, now they are advised to wear desert colours as blue is like walking around with a target on you.

Did the discipline of being in the army, being on the go, help at all when establishing yourself as a photographer?

I don't think I am established as a photographer but I do think the discipline of being in the Marines has helped me with life in general and not just photography. I believe in doing things to the best of my ability even if I don't want to be doing them. I know what I have put myself through in the past and so now I know that I can put myself through similar again.

What is your aim as a photographer?

My aim is to take pictures and shoot stories that capture the imagination of the viewer. I want to show people new things and to engage them in what is going on in these different places. I want my images to not just tell a story I want them to impart a feeling or an emotion into the viewer; what is the feeling in the image just as much as what is in the image.



MARTIN FIGURA

Martin Figura was in the armed forces for twenty five years. He turned his focus to documentary photography and poetry, both disciplines have spawned such books as 'The Man's Army' and 'Whistle'.

Why did you initially join the armed forces?

I was from a care background and it was a way of self-supporting myself and also to get away from Crewe (where the last cinema had just been closed to be the first McDonalds). I left school at fifteen to join the pay corps apprentice college. On leave I decided to take the idea of a military career more seriously. Rising through the ranks and retiring at forty as a major.

I was always an unconventional soldier, but managed to thrive. The systematic organisation skills I learnt came in very useful in setting about changing my life. I managed to avoid becoming too dogmatic.

How did photography play a part in your service?

I was a keen adventure trainer & canoe instructor, but I also had a creative drive that was looking for an outlet.

As my career progressed and my work began to be sold I decided to buy a Mamiya 6 medium format camera and a studio light. In the early nineties I became aware of the idea of documentary photography and decided to explore the army's struggles with social change, in particular gender and sexuality and also the idea of empire as a pejorative. Given how empire and masculinity pervaded the environment visually, I was interested in exploring this.



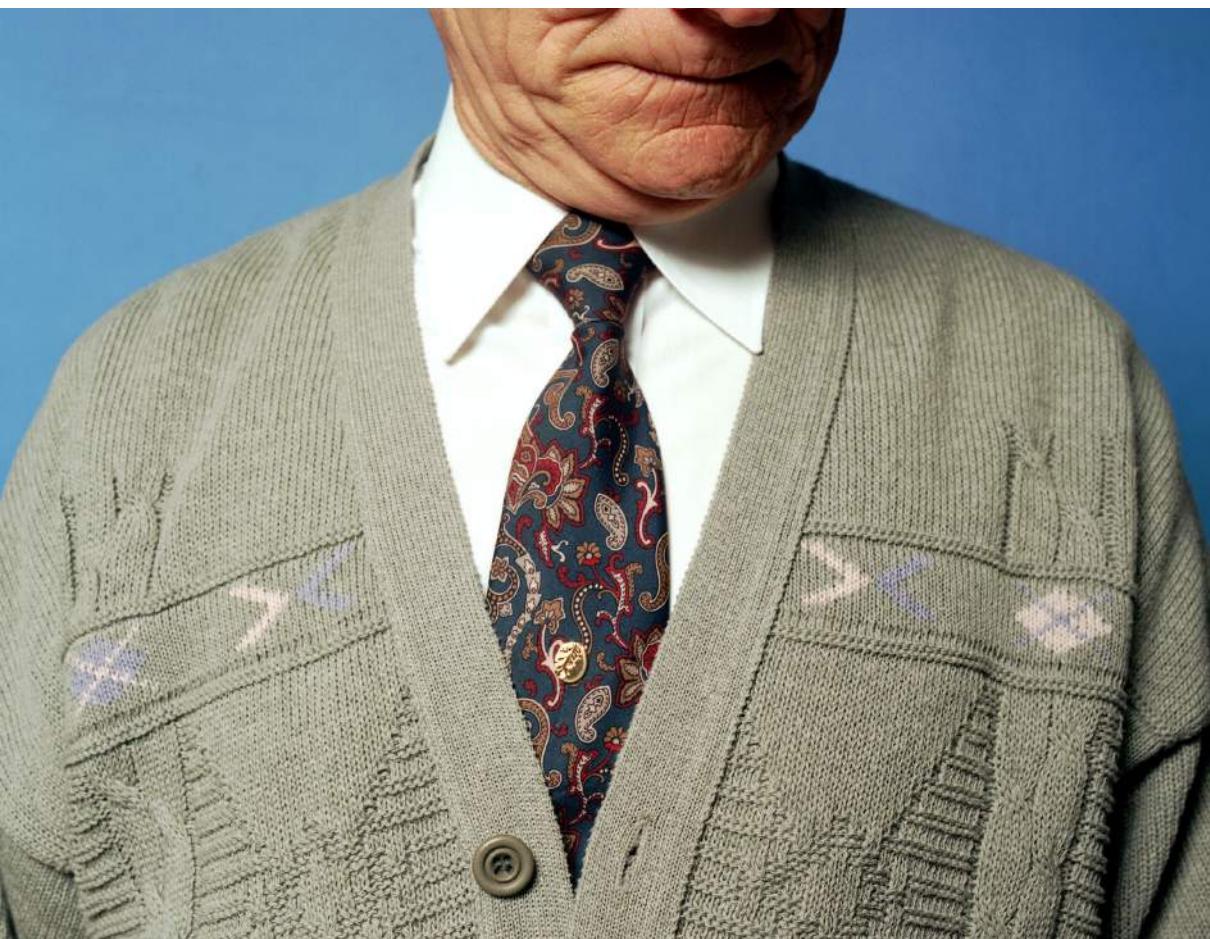


How has your creative practice developed over time and what do you try to achieve with each body of work you create?

I now largely photograph writers for the Writing Organisation I work part time for. After the Army work I worked editorially and on exhibitions which consumed my spare time (97-99). Side Gallery in Newcastle commissioned me to make new work and I also got a couple of other commissions around 99. The millennium seemed to re-kindled the need for photography. As Side gallery had such a rich heritage and frankly intimidating back catalogue in Black & White, I decided to make the shift to colour. I decided to make the work more celebratory and to differentiate it from previous work. It gave me contact with lots of artists and arts organisations which led to further work in the field for a few years and beyond.

What prompted the shift to focus on poetry?

My poetry, like my photography, concerns itself with people and social history which is what interests me. I am a nosy bastard. I'd started writing just as I left, more with an idea of performing/ showing off - and did quite well. I gradually got sucked into the poetry world and took my writing more seriously. I decided to explore my childhood story further at university. Around then I met my second wife the poet Helen Ivory and began to knock about in that world more than photography.



ARTISTS
WORKING IN
ZONES OF
COMBAT
AND CONFLICT



GEORGE BUTLER

George Butler is an artist and illustrator. Since leaving Kingston University, drawing has taken George around the world, depicting the oil fields in Azerbaijan, soldiers in Afghanistan, reconstructive plastic surgery, G20 riots, the New York Fire Department and Asian Elephants.





How did you begin as a reportage artist?

For my final year at university I decided to go to Afghanistan with my uncle who was a serving soldier in the British Army. It took the soldiers three minutes to get over the fact that I was drawing them and then they would carry on as normal – it turned out to be a welcome distraction from what was happening at the time. By drawing I was able to spend time with the subjects and find a different angle and perspective of the situation at hand.

How do you decide on what to draw?

If you've got enough time, which there never is, it's good to just walk and just see what comes around and usually something does. Recently I was drawing in a Refugee Camp in Lebanon and we had ten days to describe the living conditions of ten million Syrian Refugees and that's an impossible task and in that instance I just had to draw what was in front of me and trust that the story behind it and that which was on the page would be a very small cross section of what was happening their day to day and I hope it did justice but yeah you're looking for a balance of things. Quite often it is hard to describe with one single image so you end up creating several images – a body of work. Where they are, where they've come from. There's an element of trust. Someone said to me that if you need to take a photo of somebody you need more trust which is something I agree with.



Is there a particular focus within each image?

The drawing is a reaction to what I see and hear in the environment that I am in. Inevitably you are influenced by who it is that guides you around because you may have never been to that place before and you will end up listening and watching what it is they want to show you whether it is interesting or not. The aim is to visualise a narrative through the symbols which are presented in the environment in front of you, but I'm also looking for juxtapositions, things which contradict one another and are interesting to visualise, which can be a distraction from the story that you're telling, so you have to find a balance, a combination of instinct and story. The idea is that people like them, otherwise I wouldn't be able to make a living out of it but I don't think I'm lead by that but equally you've got to be behind that to some extent. For example if it's going to a newspaper it has to be a strong image, a colourful image with no pretension, so you lead by that.

Is there a structure you adhere to when working?

The best drawings that I've done have been the ones where I've been on my own to explore. I once rang the doorbell of the New York Fire Department and asked to draw the building. I wasn't allowed to be in certain areas of the building and so I stayed outside, all the time becoming familiar with the place. I was about to leave after hours of drawing and they said, 'don't be silly we've cooked you some dinner, come and eat with us' so I'd go to the back to where previously I was forbidden from going and eat dinner with these lads from Brooklyn.

One of them cooked each night with these huge, huge portions of food and over time I was basically free to do whatever I wanted in there. I'd draw them working, in the van and on the job with them, I was able to see things that tourists, strangers never get to see and that's what I think drawing can achieve, it can show these moments. The people aren't recognisable and the fire engine probably doesn't have enough stripes on the side but that's not really the point.

I think if you feel strong enough you should not apply any structure or adhere to any structure, sack it all off and do what you want, because it'd probably inform your work more in the end.

Do people question the subjective aspect of the narrative?

Some people suggest that I'm not capturing the story as it's a visual representation of a scene. I suppose practically that is true but realistically the story comes back and is printed in newspapers it accompanies the story and offers a new perspective for a broad audience.

The person who I'm publishing the pictures with knows who I am and what it is I'm doing. Most of the people who have looked at the drawings have looked at them before and have met me, they know the story to it and so they are willing to buy the drawings and publish it alongside the written text. In that regards it's a personal process. You need to like the picture, to know a little bit about the subject and you probably need to know the person in it. In that sense it can be effective.

Why are you doing it?

One – I get a basic satisfaction from the process. Copying something onto paper with a black pen and playing with the aesthetics can be rewarding.

Two – Its unusual situations that people find that they may misunderstand, or that I may misunderstand that I want to learn about. I've been fortunate enough to visit situations of conflict such as Syria and Afghanistan but equally I've been to places such as New York Fire Department, oil rigs and murder trials which are all different in their ways.

I've always found travel and people fascinating. Being in a different country and meeting strangers who will open their homes up to you, socialise, feed and provide a place to stay is another reason to it, it should surprise me but that's the way these people are and that's a reason for doing it. This social side allows the work to grow and become a richer experience, becoming more involved, drawing more subjects and eventually having a body of work representing the dialogue and experience shared.





Is there a danger when drawing in these environments, and if so how do you overcome them?

I try to not put myself in too much danger. There's only certain things that you can do. If recording the action is what you want to do then there's no perfect action than the film camera, so I pick subjects based on that. I don't necessarily need to go to places with bombs falling and bullets flying but there is an element of it. Equally you can do these things sensibly, you plan as far as you can and trust who you're going with and try to understand the situation to the best ability.

I often question whether drawing can make a difference to these people's lives or in general, and I don't know the answer to that. I think we come to a stage where there are such huge corporate, commercial institutions that do things by such a strict protocol because they have to because they've got huge amounts of other people's money or they've been elected, so they have to follow a process; if you do A then you're allowed to do B, then you're allowed to do C and that means you can tick these boxes and that means you can sign this document and move forward. All that management, consultant speak and somewhere lost in the middle of that there is a value to things that are creative. Whether they are written, play's, production, drawings, radio recordings, innovative ideas that are probably linked to cultural things that we value and have all equal importance. They probably don't have a quantifiable, tangible, can't put a price on them, you can't explain how much good they've done or bad they've done, but I think certainly as humans, as individuals we always relate to them, and they are there for important reasons.

Having said that if you take places like Zaatari Refugee Camp with 150,000 people when they first arrived they were all given a tent between five of them, three litres of water a day, a packed lunch for that day, a certain amount of space, and of course once the 150,000 people arrived there was a huge amount of trouble and



violence. Everyone was out for themselves, volunteers were treated badly and that was because these people were not being treated as individuals so what they had to do was give them a choice, was give them tokens to shop at supermarkets, - to start new lives because they had lost everything, and I don't know whether drawing can ever fill or tick one of those boxes but we will see – still going to have to do it a bit longer.

Yes, but that initial drawing has informed this education, has informed you to question your role, maybe the drawings are just a process for you to think differently and move your work in a different direction?

Yes but I don't think I'm anywhere there yet. I hope that I will have gone to enough places and seen things and met people and try to understand what they were doing and why there were doing it and that that might be of some value for the drawing. Perhaps drawing is just the beginning and actually maybe there is a way of turning it back around, I don't know, make a difference – probably a naïve thing to say – I really don't know where it's going to take me, but I'm going to stick with it for the moment.

Aside from the drawings what else are you working on?

With a group of friends we have started a very small charity raising humanitarian aid in Syria. The charity is called The hands Up Foundation and is based around the idea that the majority of Syrians were suffering at the hands of a minority, a tragic betrayal by a government on its own people. Of course the problem is more complicated now but many of the humanitarian issues remain the same. The need for food, water, medicine, mental health treatment, prosthetic limbs.

Our current project funds Syrian doctors and nurses wages in a hospital in Aleppo where they treat anyone and everyone who can get through their doors. This project is now in its second year.



ARABELLA DORMAN

Arabella Dorman is a portrait painter and war artist. Once a student at Byam Shaw School of Art, London, Edinburgh University and Charles Cecil Atelier, Florence. Arabella's military paintings are drawn from first-hand experience of working with British forces in Southern Iraq and British and Afghan forces in Afghanistan.

How did you come to paint environments of conflict and combat?

Through my classes as a portrait painter I met a senior military general at the time of the Iraq occupation in 2006 and he suggested, why don't you come to Iraq and be an official war artist? To which I leapt at because it's funny, when I look back at it all of my school work used to be about conflict, about the first and second world war, big collages for my A-level pieces all about the second world war and human beings caught up in it, so I guess I've always had this interest. One thing led to another and I was in Iraq for a month in 2006 and then I travelled with different divisional units who were all British, one of whom was the green jackets, the rifles – we got on really well, I did a lot of work for them, so they invited me back when they were in Sangin in 2009 which was pretty tough. I still think of Sangin as one of the hardest tours since the second world war in our army, when we lost our guys and it was pretty brutal fighting.

It's an ongoing journey for me, in 2010 I did a whole trip around north, west, central area, and then last year I went back again and travelled very widely around Helmand to see some of the changes that were taking place.

Do you prefer to be a fly on the wall, or in the middle of it all?

Bit of both. I like being amongst it but I don't want to intrude and I'm very aware that I'm different, and I'm very respectful of that and I don't want to get in their way at all. Especially because privacy is a major issue, I also think you can learn a lot from just being an observer but I think it's often too easy to hide behind that, just because you're a bit shy or nervous about getting in there. So I do try to force myself to muck in but at the same time I am aware to keep respectful of their space.

What are you focusing on when visiting?

Focusing on the civilians when I was in Sangin, in 09 I spent a lot of time with the Afghan international army and whenever I started drawing they would say 'this isn't our country, this isn't Afghanistan' you must see the rest of it, you must go up north, because this isn't representing the beauty of our country. And so then I was determined to go back to see the rest of the country and I felt I had to give a much more balanced picture if I was going to do an exhibition, I had to represent not just a military point of view but also a civilian point of view. I'm really trying to look at the conflict and the immediate impact from the professions of the soldier's point of view and the civilians, but also the whole history of Afghanistan, the culture, their incredible close family ties, their tenacity, their strength. It's a very compelling country. Given that 42% of the population is under 14 the future really does rest in the hands of the young.





Why this particular style of art?

One of the things I feel strong about is that although classical representation is out of vogue in the British Art World today it still has a huge amount of power and resonance to communicate and I think that needs to be put back on the map and back onto the public focus. Rather than just feeding people with installation art, which has its place completely but it shouldn't be to the exclusion of representative art.

There's a lot of research involved in your subjects, forming part of your process of painting.

I really try to do justice to my subjects. One of the things I'm trying to do with my work is to get behind the preconceptions, especially public and media preconceptions of a place or people. Sadly our association with Afghanistan is through the reported conflict, which is superbly reported by the journalists but it is sometimes at a cost of a quieter story. And as a painter, rather than a photographer I am more interested and involved in a quieter side, painting is a lot more meditative than a photograph which is here and now, whilst both carry a huge narrative potential I think a painting is a slower journey. So what I'm really trying to do is bring the focus back to those humans who are caught up in conflict and subject and try to peel the preconceptions away and find something quieter and hidden. Things that are hidden in the shadow of war. Or if you like, the spaces in-between the headline stories, the silent and invisible.

Do the soldiers react to your work?

They do on the ground, they are hilarious. On a more serious level they really support what I do on regimental conditions and a lot of the guys really kindly say that they like the work, some of them buy it.

I have nothing but respect for our soldiers – they are tough guys, and they are human, some of them are still so young, as a mother I see them as boys. They see things no eighteen, no human should see, and even as an adult I don't know if I could cope with the things that they go through, and yet they go back, back to patrol, back to the place their friend was blown up a week ago – it's pretty humbling, it makes you feel very small.

For a month I walked out of a door and wondered 'would I walk back through that door this evening' back here, in the UK, you don't think that, and that's freedom, that's incredible. My paintings do touch on that nerve of how lucky we are in this country and a bit of a call to arms, a rallying call. I want to position my paintings as a platform to raise awareness to think of them as an activation rather than something to just hang on a wall. I hope they motivate people.



Michelle Dierman
13



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JON ENGLAND

Jon England is contemporary artist exploring traces of history.



How did you begin your career as an artist?

I graduated (BA Fine art) from St Martin's, London in 2004. The work I made there was always politically engaged, massively influenced by the inherent tension of swapping my rural upbringing for a Charing Cross Rd studio overlooking Centrepoint in the weeks after September 11th.

London took its toll on me and so I returned to Somerset after my degree and although I made very little work for a year or two I did get access to a WWII timber-framed hut and converted it into a studio.

What initially drew you to create work based on war?

I'd always made work that responded to my surroundings, either politically or the physical environment and so responding to the building, part of the physical legacy of WWII that I had grown up surrounded by and the history of Westonzoyland airfield where it originated seemed a natural focus for my first new body of work.

Subsequent reading led to my discovery that one of 'The Fifty' executed after the real life 'Great Escape' (from Stalag Luft 3 Prisoner of War camp) had come from Taunton and studied at the college where I was working. Without a great deal of conscious intent exploring local links to historic conflicts had become the primary focus of my work.

Is there a typical process which you follow when creating a new body of work?

Combat is so utterly abstract to me, so removed from my experience and so a site specific approach helps to focus my research, often revealing unexpected connections to landmark events or connecting place and lived experience to the narrative of film or literature. The other integral factor is the use process and materials which help to form a bridge, a physical connection to that specific history or lived experience so removed from my own.

Many new threads of research initiate the creation of new processes in response to them. When working through my research I'm always creating lists of materials that formed the minutia of someone's lived experience seeking to find those that speak of the specific and if possible also the universal.

I then explore if they have potentials as an artistic medium, what would happen if they are heated or cooled, diluted or distilled.

As an example my 'Klim' milk portraits speak of the specific experience of those individuals who participated in the 'Great Escape', Klim (milk backwards) is a brand that the POW's received in their Red Cross parcels but they also used the empty tins to build ventilation ducts to the tunnels so it was integral to their experience. At the same time milk is the most basic foodstuff, universal, even primordial.



403281 F/L Albert H Hake, Australian, born 30-Jun-16, 72 Sqdn, Pow 28-Dec-41, recaptured near Gorlitz, murdered 31-Mar-44 by Lux and Scharpwinkel, cremated at Gorlitz.



89375 F/L James L R Long, British, born 21-Feb-15, 9 Sqdn (shot down 27-Nov-43, Wellington IA, R1395 W5(K)), recaptured near Sagan, last seen alive 12-Apr-44, murdered by Lux; cremated at Breslau.

What interests you about issues of conflict?

The legacy of conflict, particularly the global world wars, which I have most often responded to, is intrinsic to almost every conceivable aspect of society. There is barely a family tree untouched by conflict, a town that hasn't at some time been employed in military industry. The particular dynamic of WWII, being so remote to the experience of most of the population yet within living memory of a rapidly diminishing proportion makes it of particular interest. The traumatic legacy affects survivor's relationships with their children and then their children.

The subsequent redrawing of maps and dividing of the spoils have ever evolving consequences that continue to be a major driver of many of today's conflicts, the politics of remembrance/commemoration, memorial, 'living history' groups, film, literature and art. I find interest in it all but it's too huge to comprehend.

What does art offer that an archive of historical documents/information does not?

Sometimes items from an archive, an object or letter can be completely compelling, as powerful on their own as any work of art. More often an artwork is able to draw out the essence of a mass of archive material to distil it into a single entity to express both the specific and the universal; well that's what I aspire to at least.

How have people like Ted Milligan helped shape your practice and the way that you view your work?

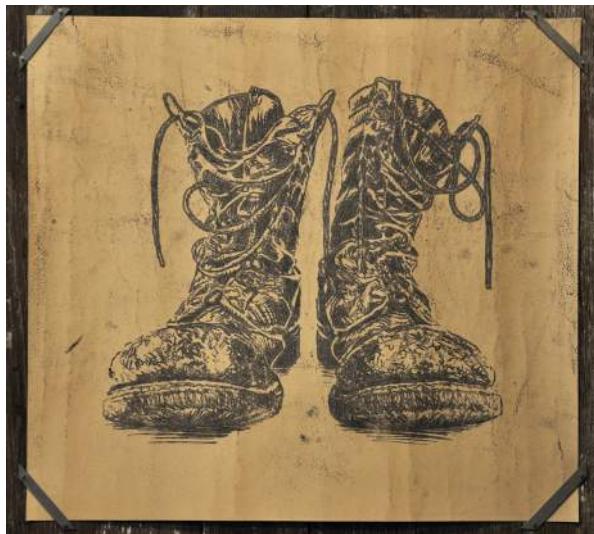
Ted Milligan was a WWII Lancaster Bomb Aimer and prisoner of war with whom I developed an incredibly close relationship. He was shot down on his first mission with the loss of three of his crewmates but went on to create an exceptional archive of artworks and diaries whilst imprisoned.

It was remarkable to build such a depth of connection with one individual, to witness the enduring emotional legacy that derived from the intensity of his experience, getting to know him at the end of his life but also in his formative years through his extensive archive and reminiscences.

My role of artist broadened into that of archivist and facilitator, encouraging him to make new work from memory and enabling him to express his lived experience was my primary task.

My job as maker became largely secondary, creating just one or two works such as the boot polish monoprint of his boots to encapsulate the experience communicated to me.

Inspired by this collaboration with Ted Milligan I became a partner in the 'Combat Art' project. 500 pocket sized art kits were supplied to 40 Commando Royal Marines for their Herrick 17, Afghan deployment in 2012-13 allowing me to initiate the creation of new archives amongst current service personnel.





Valle d'Aosta, Palvico

GORDON RUSHMER

Gordon Rushmer has been a practising artist for over forty years. From English Landscapes to hostile environments he has earned a reputation as an internationally recognised war artist.

How do you initially approach a subject? Is it something visually instinctual that you feel the need to paint or is it more thought out, where narrative plays a part of your decision to paint?

I've certainly had to learn as I've gone along. I didn't set out to be a war artist so when the opportunity came to join Dutch Special Forces in Bosnia in 1997/8 it was a steep learning curve. I was making a living from landscape painting so the basic skills were there and I applied the same strategy when I dropped into the tail end of the Balkan conflict. I asked my hosts to take me around, show me everything and tell me stories. Very quickly one gets the feel of a situation and the usual 'eye for a subject' kicks in. For me it's mostly instinct, I saw old ladies scavenging for food and firewood, and injured men struggling on crutches, that combination prompted a series of 'Widow' paintings. The effect of conflict on civilian populations has become a constant theme, refugees in Eritrea, bomb blast victims in Kosovo, people begging for clean water in Iraq. So it is often the germ of an idea that leads one on to dig for a story. A combination of finding something important to say and the excitement of challenging images to paint. I can get quite lost in the excitement of a mortar scarred wall, the shapes, colours, the abstract quality. There is a balance between the quality of the art work and the message, there has to be integrity. It's the same when portraying Royal Marines or medics at work, a gut response to a situation which I then develop. Although I am always working for and alongside military people it is rare to be told what is required, it's my responsibility to tell the story. I do sometimes have to argue for an idea as my eye finds what is often mundane, something 'telling' but not obvious to my hosts.



Gordon Brushwood



Could you explain the difficulties of working in environments of conflict and combat?

The first is relatively straight forward, once they realise I'm a normal bloke who swears and can make a brew I'm in! Survival is more problematic, I arrive from rural Sussex and touch down in Afghanistan within eighteen hours, the temperature is 40 C. I don't know where they are going to take me, where I'm going to sleep, eat or be able to contact home again. There is always a shortage of lavatory paper - lesson one, always have a roll in the top of your Bergen (rucksack)! I have to remember the drill for boarding a Chinook for the next part of the journey down to Helmand - no loose clothing, sleeves rolled down and don't stray from the direct approach to the rear ramp. And ear-plugs in!

Once one has established friendships with escorts and minders everything becomes a little more easy, you are fitted with body armour and helmet, blood group noted and probably fed. Sleeping is a bit hit and miss, I carry a mat and sleeping bag so anywhere will do and often does! There's constant noise day and night, all bases have helicopter pads so supplies and personnel are coming in and out constantly. Down the list of priorities comes the job – searching for material, there are meetings and briefings on ops and the situation on the ground. Then a strategy evolves, a combination of my requirements/ ideas and the practicalities of moving around, do we have transport? We may wait for two days for a ride on something. Can I go out on patrol, see the enemy, visit the field hospital etc? Once I'm up and running I'm working hard, snatching images in sketch form and with camera when it's dangerous to sit around. I do as I'm told, when my escort says "we move" – that's it, go! I try to use my sketch book whenever possible, I have them made to fit down the back of my Bergen. Pencil work is fine, watercolour sketching is more problematic in the field with the drying speed in extreme heat and too much clutter, maybe one brush, a small box of pigments and my drinking water in a collapsible pot. And of course when things happen they happen fast, there are long periods

of boredom with mad moments of noise and excitement. During the quiet times I can expand my initial drawings and having committed much to memory go for mood and detail.

Is there a particular perspective you try to capture within your work?

Connecting with one's audience is paramount, especially for a war artist, and here I stress war artist not military painter. I discovered very quickly the frustration felt by soldiers not having the right equipment, faulty weapons, shortages of body armour etc. and the lack of respect for politicians. Being thrown into situations with little real preparation. These become my frustrations plus the utter futility and suffering. So not only do I endeavour to show the horrors inflicted on the civilians, the hunger, the injuries but also the ineptitude of politicians.

I constantly feel my paintings need an accompanying sound-track, explanations and home truths. I try and give a balanced view on conflict, showing as many aspects as possible. I have had people weep in front of my pieces so I think the connection has been made on occasions.

Why do you work with watercolour?

Watercolour is sometimes regarded as 'the poor relation' but it is in reality the most demanding, unforgiving of all media. That alone persuades me to persevere with it! I do work in oils for my large pieces but anything smaller than 20" x 30" is in watercolour. It doesn't have to be the quick option, handled the right way it can be worked very hard. You do need to think ahead and consider your moves. Today's superb pigments give a great intensity of colour especially when used on traditional papers such as Arches or Two Rivers.

Obviously in the field for sketching, the speed of application on top of pencil work is a great advantage, or maybe I will apply colour first and draw-in later with line. It is a very flexible way of working. I just enjoy using it!



IMAGE CREDITS

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<http://www.jackoart.com/>



Jon Bottomley
(5 June 2014)
Mark Jackson's Studio,
photographs



GARY BENNETT
<http://www.contemporarywarart.co.uk/>



Gary Bennett
Memorial 4



Gary Bennett
Friendly fallout



Gary Bennett
Angel and Fallen,
dry point etching

DOUG FARTHING
<http://www.douglasfarthingart.co.uk/>



Doug Farthing
Blackhawks over
Helmand, Afghanistan



Doug Farthing
Over the top



Doug Farthing
untitled



Doug Farthing
untitled

RICHARD SALTER
<http://www.armyartist.co.uk/>



Richard Salter (2014)
Ready for Battle,
oil on panel



Richard Salter (2013)
**One child, Three
Soldiers, Inescapable
Memories**,
oil on panel



Richard Salter (2013)
Entrapment,
oil on panel

SEAN WALKER
<http://www.rabbitholeimages.com/>



Sean Walker
Afghan security forces and US troops conducting home searches in rural Ghazni.
The area had not been patrolled for months and the Taliban had retaken control of the area. Nothing was discovered, although they came under fire that afternoon.
This was supporting a CNN story. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPHLq__5oGE, photograph



Sean Walker
Anti-Gaddafi rebel prays on the much contested road between Ajdabiya and Brega at the height of the Libyan civil war,
photograph



Sean Walker
Iris photographed by US soldier in Afghanistan,
photograph



Sean Walker
**Helicopter flies through
Ghazni,
photograph**

MATTHEW ELLIOTT
<http://mrephotography.4ormat.com/>



Matthew Elliott
**untitled,
photograph**



Matthew Elliott
**untitled,
photograph**



Matthew Elliott
**From work
entitled 'PTSD',
photograph**



Matthew Elliott
**untitled,
photograph**

SEAN POWER
<http://sean-power.co.uk/>



Sean Power (August 2010)
**Marines from 40 Commando Royal Marines,
receive a set of orders prior to a patrol around the
edge of Sangin, in Helmand Province, Afghanistan,
photograph**



Sean Power (8 October 2009)
**A soldier from the Royal Tank Regiment in his
Viking Armoured Vehicle, studies a map...?,
photograph**



Sean Power (13 February 2014)
**Officers from Kenya's paramilitary, GSU keep
an eye on protestors during a demonstration in
Nairobi, Kenya against tough new media controls,
photograph**



Sean Power (13 February 2014)

Polystyrene carvings of babies are loaded into the back of a truck after a protest in Nairobi, Kenya against being treated like babies by the Kenyan Government in the face of tough new controls on media organisations.
photograph



Sean Power (13 February 2014)

A protestor in Nairobi, Kenya, carries a banner protesting against recent government laws restricting the freedom of the press,
photograph



Sean Power (8 October 2013)

A Gurkha clears a safe route across a vulnerable crossing point in Helmand Province, Afghanistan,
photograph

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<http://www.martinfigura.co.uk/>



Martin Figura
untitled



Martin Figura
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GEORGE BUTLER

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Goats, Syria



George Butler
Refugees, Syria



George Butler
Guinea Fowl Man



George Butler
Doctors of the World
visit Kamed el Loz

A RABELLA DORMAN
<http://www.arabelladorman.com/>



Arabella Dorman (2009)
Waiting, Sangin



Arabella Dorman (2014)
The Dance, Afghanistan



Arabella Dorman (2013)
The Lancer, A Long Way
from Home

JON ENGLAND
<https://twitter.com/JEnglandArtist>



Jon England
The Last Nails



Jon England
Flt Lt James L R Long,
Klim milk on blotting paper
mounted on reclaimed
timber



Jon England
Flt Lt Albert H Hake,
Klim milk on blotting paper
mounted on reclaimed
timber



Jon England
Boots,
WWII era boot polish
monoprint



Jon England (2010)
Ted Milligan,
photograph

GORDON RUSHMER

<http://www.gordonrushmer.co.uk/>



Gordon Rushmer
Mosque, Ahmici



Gordon Rushmer
Flying into Lashkargah



Gordon Rushmer
Remembrance

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