

As a combat photographer for the United States Marine Corps from 2008-2016, I have a unique perspective on the realities of military service and the impact of war on individuals and society. My artistic practice aims to challenge the one-dimensional representations of military experiences often perpetuated in mass media, investigating and subverting the dominant cultural narratives that simplify and homogenize veterans' affairs, reducing them to heroic or traumatized stereotypes. Though some experiences may be universal, this investigation aims to produce art highlighting the individualistic nature of veterans' experiences and the complex ways military power and violence intersect with broader social issues.

As an active military member, I abided by the ethical tenets of journalistic practices, ensuring that all of my visual media underwent meticulous scrutiny by a public release authority, which determined the appropriateness of dissemination to the general populace. I also collaborated with Information Operations, assigned to curate and procure visual material to strategically promote specific messaging to targeted groups, aiming to shape their opinions. As an artist, I now have the liberty to infuse my personal perspective and truth into my work without being compelled to adhere to the conventional journalistic standards of objectivity and accuracy. Additionally, unlike those who operate within a military framework, my accountability is exclusive to my own ethical standards and the interests and authenticity of my audience.

I believe that war and military service cannot be understood in isolation from their broader social and cultural contexts. The mythologization and romanticization of military experiences through cultural symbols and narratives only obscure the complex realities of war and its impact on individuals and society. It is, therefore, essential to listen to the voices and experiences of military personnel and veterans to gain a nuanced understanding of the complexities of military experiences.

As an artist, I critically reflect and discuss the mechanisms of military power and violence and their inextricable links to broader socio-cultural dynamics. Through a photography-based

inquiry into themes such as ritual, patriotism, gun culture, and the commodification of military goods, I aim to encourage viewers to consider the connection between military institutions and our shared cultural imagination.

In this period following my active military service and my transition to civilian life, I have had the opportunity to reflect on the mechanisms of the military and the construction and consumption of worldviews. My perspective has evolved beyond the lens of an active-duty service member, incorporating critical examination and questioning of the warrior culture and desensitization to violence. Although my sense of purpose and pride in serving remained strong, I, like many professional soldiers, despised the nature of war, which plainly, is a process of death and destruction, and longed for peace.

Upon exiting service, I engaged in introspection and critically evaluated my experiences, which afforded me a greater understanding of the role of military members and the nature of institutionalized violence. As a result, I am now navigating a complex dichotomy where I simultaneously embrace pride in my service while also questioning the problematic aspects of the military. To further my understanding of the workings of the military as an institution, I employ anthropological research as a foundational tool in my work.

My areas of interest for future projects include exploring recruitment efforts implemented by the Armed Forces, where I aim to examine their various methods and approaches. Another area is re-evaluating Marine Corps Boot Camp at Parris Island, South Carolina. Through a study of photographs capturing the training spaces and donated letters sent by former recruits, my objective is to gain insights into the creation of spatial and episodic memories during this intense period of military training.

My work has been informed by the duality as a combat participant and a removed observer as also the dual perspective of a former service member and now as a member of the civilian populace. These dichotomies allow me to explore military service from a unique vantage

point. By synthesizing these disparate viewpoints into a cohesive narrative, I aim to highlight the individualistic nature of veterans' experiences while acknowledging the broader cultural and institutional context that informs them.

Ultimately, my goal is to challenge conventional modes of representation, cultivate empathy, and foster a nuanced understanding of the complexities of military experiences and their impact on individuals and society, contributing to a more thoughtful and nuanced public discourse about war and its effects by disrupting the dominant cultural narratives surrounding the military and encouraging critical dialogue. My work is intended to resonate with both military and civilian communities, recognizing that the former possesses a more experiential understanding of the subject matter.