



The Earl Project

Making Feels Good!

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The Earl Project engages veterans and soldiers in creating new, original works of visual art both individually and in a collective war stories scroll sculpture. No previous art-making experience is required. It is a project based on the premise that making is cathartic, making feels good, and making meaning of combat experience through art-telling stories has healing potential. In *Burn-out* art workshops, veterans and soldiers will be taught simple but evocative methods in creating images and stories with fabric and paper burn-out techniques, conceived as emblematic of the psychic burn-out that many soldiers experience. They also are invited to contribute their stories to a community-made sculpture, transformed into abstracted language so it remains as confidential as they choose. Using burn-out techniques along with mending stitches as both metaphor and realization of healing in a physical manifestation, they will transform lived experience into art. The premier feature presentation is two exhibitions of individual and collective work produced by art workshop participants, at the Manhattan Art Center (Manhattan, KS) and Mingenback Art Gallery (Lindsborg, KS) in summer 2019.

Burn-out Art Workshops – registration opens October 1, 2018, www.theearlproject.org

From late October 2018- mid-June 2019, there will be eleven *Burn-out* workshops at the Manhattan Art Center, Beach Museum of Art, and Mingenback Art Center, open to any veteran or active duty soldier. The single session, three-hour workshops include the opportunity to make individual and collective work. An important catharsis of making is the ability to keep what was created, to experience and reflect on what is conveyed and remembered. The title *Burn-out* - slang for the exhaustion and psychic collapse that many soldiers face - is also the name of several simple techniques that will be used for the works. Veterans/soldiers are asked to bring meaningful photos, cloth, and stories of their time in service, and learn to create images and abstractions that are literally burned out, as they experiment and explore new techniques such as devore and stripping color with bleach. They will also learn fold and burn techniques with fire, print altered images on cloth or paper (printers available in the workshops), and learn to layer stitching or drawing back over the image. The final form might be a wall work, pillow that artist assistants will help sew, or a book cover to hold their stories.

The other potential for making meaning is participation in a group project, a sum greater than the parts, a combination of stories that enacts the whole community. The stories aren't intended to be legible, rather fragmented words or stories added to a larger length of cloth. Veterans/soldiers are asked to bring a short reflection or memory written on paper that they would like to release or forget. They will not be asked to read it out loud or share, just select a few words or letters that are to be included in the community work. They can also contribute stories they don't want to forget. The letter forms can be printed, transferred, or cut away to reveal the letters behind in negative space. The veterans/soldiers will learn to sew their story contribution onto a base cloth. As different colors, letters, and stories are added at each workshop by different participants and rolled onto a sculptural structure, it will create the world's largest war stories sculpture, a custom framework with components that will be multiplied as needed.

Workshop participants are asked to bring some cloth fragments from their life – clothing, bedding, towels - to use for the works. The memory of bodily experience remains in the cloth, which is why it should be cloth that has been used or worn by them, and not purchase new cloth. It becomes an integral part of the material creative expression in the work, and individual voices that are visually heard. The cloth can be

connected to home or the military. The innovation of using mending as metaphor is at the forefront in current art world dialogue, but it's atypical to connect stitching with military personnel. The not-cute burn-out techniques engage veterans and soldiers of all genders with textiles and stitching in a military culture of masculinity, the physical manifestation and expression of the complex emotions and contributions of military service. The techniques hopefully address invisible psychic injuries through expressive release, and respect for confidentiality and privacy of their experiences, as the soldier chooses.

We'd like for all veteran/soldier workshop participants to want to show their individual works in the two exhibitions in summer 2019 along with the community sculpture work, but it won't be required. They can decide. Participants will receive professional exhibition announcements and be encouraged to invite friends and family for their exhibition, to share in community accomplishment and pride. The public exhibitions will share with a larger community how open attitudes towards new ways of healing the traumas of war with art-making is a valuable lived creativity. It also offers viewers of the exhibitions an opportunity to interact with ideas and populations that they may not typically engage with, and to learn of experiences quite outside their own.

History

The project is named for Earl Molzen, a PTSD survivor of World War II that was an inspiration to his family for his kindness, but relevant to this project, for the unusual and delightful objects, creative interventions and "fixes" that he made over sixty years as part of life on his parents' central Kansas dairy farm. The artist creator of the project, Earl's niece, is Geraldine Craig, who conceptualized its structure and meaning based on her love for her uncle, her experience making art and teaching art to veterans. She serves as the project director and lead for the artist teacher collaborations with the soldiers, hiring the artist assistants for the art workshops and installation of the final exhibitions. Contact her directly at gkcraig@ksu.edu.

Future

There is strong interest and desire to continue the project and do more workshops and exhibitions beyond summer 2019. Thanks to the funding by a Mid-America Arts Alliance Artistic Innovations Grant and a Kansas State University Small Research Grant, the project for 2018-19 will be at no cost for veterans/soldiers to participate. The public exhibitions will be free to attend also. Documentation of examples of individual and community work made possible by the grants hopefully will help to secure additional future funding to continue The Earl Project at no cost to veterans and soldiers. We wish to donate the community war stories sculpture to a veteran's museum, where it can have ongoing story fragment contributions added. We hope The Earl Project will continue for many years, for veterans/soldiers to continue sharing stories and cathartic meaning-making through art.