INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, military conflicts have been an important subject matter for the visual artist. By WWI the U.S. military saw the importance of the Visual Arts for historical interpretation and acceptance on the home front. WWI was the first time the U.S. Army selected recognized illustrators and gave them direct commissions as captains to depict the war. By WWII all branches of the military had groups of artists recording war images. Also several private sector groups such as Life Magazine and Libby (a medical supply company) had their own artists recording the war and its effort to further democracy by exposing the reality of war to the people at home.

During WWII artists were commissioned for their interpretation of the war usually depicting the every-day soldier. Each conflict had its own group of military artists who were “common men,” becoming both artist and fighter. These artists showed the American public combat life through reproductions in publications of the time. The artists sent home first hand visual accounts of life on the war front. Their efforts were well received by the American public and reinforced the ideal of a democratic way of life.

The importance of this project became clear during our initial research. As a brief part of our art history course, we were surprised that our students were unaware work of this nature even existed. When lecturing and presenting on this topic, we were surprised by the interest of the students. By having a show and program related to this topic, it exposes and educates the students to one of the most powerful promotional examples of democracy through the creative endeavors of the visual artist.
The artworks selected for the exhibition and catalogue represent a chronological order from WWI to the present. Our original intention was to equally depict artwork from every war and conflict. However, the sheer volume of work housed in the U.S. Army Center of Military History and the U.S. Navy Art Collection made the original idea difficult because there are many more important examples than just pure combat art. Hubert Lanzinger’s commissioned painting “Flag Bearer-Hitler In Armor”, with a soldier’s bayonet stab through the plywood panel, displays an aggressive disapproval of a dictatorship and its threat to democracy, while Gene Klebe’s “Visiting U.S. Navy Paints Church-Karachi, Pakistan” depicts U.S. sailors as foreign diplomats during peacetime. Both examples are extreme opposites but we feel they represent actions motivated by democracy other than through acts of combat.

Why else would the military and private entities commission interpretations of the wars/conflicts, except to promote the American way of life and Democratic ideals?

James L. Knutson and Dave Wilson
1918: Advancing Germans halted by the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, June 3. Harvey Dunn was a pioneer South Dakota artist that studied at the state agricultural college, now South Dakota State University. He continued studies at the Art Institute in Chicago and became one of America’s leading illustrators. Prior to WWI, there were no recognized combat artists until the Army commissioned eight illustrators to serve as Captains. Harvey Dunn wanted to continue with the Army program, however the program was dissolved after WWI.
HUBERT LANZINGER

“Flag Bearer-Hitler
In Armor”

Oil on plywood

1934: Hubert Lanzinger was commissioned by Hitler to create this overtly egotistical portrait. A U.S. soldier’s bayonet stab through the plywood panel (See detail), displays the aggressive disapproval of a dictatorship and its threat to democracy.
The three watercolors on this page were created by Adolf Hilter during World War I, in an attempt to apply to art school. From a critical view, it is understandable why he was not accepted, due to the mediocre quality of the paintings. From a psychological view, it is interesting to note the absence of people in his work, with exception to the piece in the upper right. A female figure is present but is out of proportion to the scale of architecture.
1944: In our research we’ve found several portraits that make reference to the universal “stare”, depicting the sheer fatigue of battle.
FRANK MECHAU  “Death By Water”  Oil on canvas  World War II

1943: The time period is World War II and we were at war with Japan, yet the style of the piece is directly related to an 1830 Japanese woodblock print called “Wave At Kanagawa” by Hokusai.
1944: Though this painting was completed in 1944, it is reminiscent of the Dada art movement during the World War I era for a couple reasons. One, it relates to the Dada resentment of mechanized war machinery and secondly they held similar beliefs to anarchists - opposing rules and traditions. Blume makes a point that these soldiers were the victims of this machinery and furthermore they appear to have lost their fighting morale.
JOSEPH HIRSCH

“High Visibility Wrap”

Watercolor on paper

WORLD WAR II

1944: Documenting the injured soldiers seemed to be common amongst all of the wars and conflicts. As here with Hirsch’s watercolor, Hugh Cabot’s graphite drawing “A Man With One Eye” and Stephen Randall’s acrylic on paper “Two Medics”
HUGH CABOT

"A Man With One Eye"

Graphite

KOREAN WAR

1953 : Of all the Korean War images, we found Cabot’s traditional use of graphite, "pencil" drawings, had the most impact of this era for their absence of color.
Steve Parker, a faculty member of Black Hills State University, landed in Saigon in 1968 as a Navy Yeoman. The following is his quote about his experience. “I remember looking out of the plane as we were approaching Saigon and thinking how beautiful the country of Vietnam looked. How could so much death be happening in such a place. When we landed in Saigon it wasn’t so beautiful. Three million people crammed into a city built to hold about 300,000. The South Vietnamese living in cardboard and tin shacks were using the curbs as their bathrooms. When I checked into my first barracks we were told to check for grenades in the pull-chain toilets. Someone was blown up the week before. Reality set in.”
ROBERT COLEMAN  "EST Deros"  Watercolor on board  VIETNAM

1968: An interesting composition blending two very different cultures.
LEONARD CUTROW  "Burning Buddhist Nun"  Oil on masonite board  VIETNAM

1967 : It was quite common during the Vietnam war that Buddhists committed suicide by burning as an act of protest.
1969: Steve Randall is a resident of South Dakota who currently lives in Sioux Falls. He experimented with a wide variety of media including batik, which is a technique used in southeast Asia. Steve was also a member of the Vietnam Combat Art Program.
WARRREN W. BUCHANAN  

“Booby Trap”  Mixed media on paper  VIETNAM

1967: By adding the red slash in the composition, it makes the viewer feel the severity of the injury to that soldier. Without the slash, the impact of the piece is lost and becomes a traditional illustration having any specific relation to any specific event.
Oct. 28, 1965: Clean-up Marines removing Viet Cong dead after Marbel Mt. Battle
KENNETH T. Mc DANIEL         “Wet Paint”         Oil on canvas         VIETNAM

1968: We selected this piece for simply the abstract composition. The use of the helicopter became a critical tool during this era.
JAMES POLLOCK    “Tree Line Patrol”    Oil on canvas    VIETNAM

1968: James Pollock is a South Dakota resident who served in the United States Army Combat Art Program in Vietnam. Because of his commitment to the Vietnam Artists Program, the work from the artists involved is still respected and analyzed yet today.
March 1967: The reason we selected this piece was for its simplicity, one soldier either “on the hunt” or “being hunted” in the vast forest. Waterhouse’s use of composition allows the viewer to focus on the soldier and, at the same moment, wonder what is hiding in the remaining space.
July 1968: The manner in which this painting is rendered places the ship in direct battle with the environment.
Oct. 14 - Nov. 19, 1965: Underway replenishment - USS Independence receiving ammunition supply from the USS Mt. Katmai - South China Sea. James Knutson, who served on the USS Vesuvius, acknowledges the remarkable accuracy depicted in the piece. During this time period, ammunition ships were named after volcanoes.
ROGER BLUM

“Elephant Grass”

Watercolor on paper

VIETNAM

1967: The pure abstraction of this piece allows the viewer to experience the depth and density of the elephant grass. Like our land forces in Vietnam, the viewer can also experience the humidity and other environmental conditions of the jungle.
JOHN O. WEHRLE       “Landing Zone”       Oil on canvas       VIETNAM

1966 : An interesting aspect of this piece is how much of it is about the rendering of the grass, and then the landing of the soldiers. Wehrle seems to be informing us about the unpredictable. Again, reference to the helicopter and its importance to the era.
RONALD WILSON

“Color Study Of The Negro GI”

Watercolor on paper

VIETNAM

1968 : As a battle was fought in Vietnam, a battle over civil rights was waged in America. During the late 1940’s, President Truman was responsible for integrating the services. Under Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration, civil rights legislation was introduced yet it was overshadowed by our involvement in Vietnam. Some of the notes indicated within the study are unacceptable by today’s standards - questioning the nature of the study.
HENRIETTA SNOWDEN

“0530 Wake-Up Call”

Watercolor and colored pencil

Kosovo

2000 : In this contemporary piece, we witnessed more women involved in the military and consequently depicted in the artwork.
PETER G. VARISANO

“My Watch In The Tower”

Pastel on paper

Operation Restore Hope, Somalia

1993: When comparing Tom Lea’s painting “Marines Call It That 2000 Yard Stare” with this drawing, approximately 50 years later the fatigue of service is present implying a feeling of the “stare”.
1964 : U.S. servicemen who are trained as a fighting force are also some of the best foreign diplomats as observed in this painting. On board the USS Vesuvius from 1967 - 1969, James Knutson recalls that the personnel on the ship adopted a fishing village in the Philippines close to the naval base and performed community service projects with the citizens.
November 1961 - February 1962: The dynamic perspective and cold, gray colors of the crossroads gives you a perfect sense of climate and temperature. Images such as this show the ongoing importance of military research during peacetime.
June 1960: James Knutson - “A friend of mine joined the Navy in 1960 and took a world tour on the U.S.S. Enterprise. He visited great liberty ports throughout the world. Thus, five years later I joined and my cruise took me to Vietnam for two tours of duty. Join the Navy, see the world.”
1946: In the early testing of the atomic bomb, it appears there was a lack of understanding about the seriousness and effects of the materials on human life and the environment. As viewed by the pieces on the following page, artists were invited to view the tests and provide their interpretation. Did this weapon of mass destruction promote democratic values?

Opposite page: a. GRANT POWERS “Mike Hour, Mushroom Cloud” 1946
b. GRANT POWERS “Plus Three Seconds, Mushroom Cloud” 1946
c. GRANT POWERS “How We Looked At The Atomic Bomb” 1946
LOUIS JOSEPH KAEP  “Charge Of The Seabees”  Watercolor

PETER G. VARISANO

"Midday Madness In Mogadishu"

Oil on canvas

1960: Kaep’s watercolor is a classic example of when the structure of the composition matches the structure of the event. The use of the red, white and blue, placed against the gray values of the ship, accents the patriotic overtone of the piece. This is democracy rendered.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The curators of this exhibition would like to acknowledge the following for the support and assistance in organizing this exhibit and catalogue.

The Chiesman Center for Democracy, Inc.

The Chiesman Foundation for Democracy Black Hills State University,
Dr. George Earley, Chair
Sharon Hemmingson, Director of Grants and Special Projects
Peggy Gubbrud, Grants Office Program Assistant

Renee Klish, Army Art Curator, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C.

Karin Navhistcen Haubold, U.S. Navy Art Collection, Washington, D.C.

The Ruddell Gallery, Black Hills State University

Cal Crooks, Coordinator, Graphics and Media, Black Hills State University
Michelle Tracy, Information Specialist, Graphics and Media, Black Hills State University

Steve Parker, Associate Professor of Music, Black Hills State University

With a sincere thank you from James L. Knutson, Professor of Visual Art,
and Dave Wilson, Assistant Professor of Visual Art,
co-curators of "Rendering Democracy"