

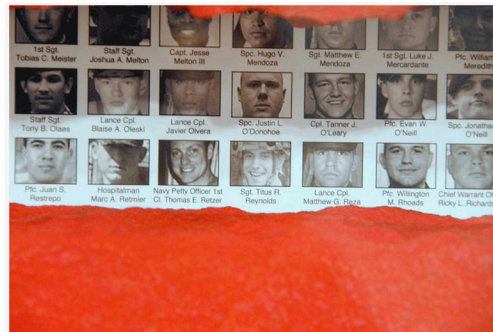
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“Westporter’s Afghanistan War Work Heads to Washington”

By Helen Klisser During



Siff in her studio in Westport’s Old Hill area.



A closeup of some of the faces on the flag.

It was the summer of 2008 and The New York Times has just published photos of U.S. casualties in Afghanistan. Westport artist Marlene Siff was devastated.

“I started looking at these photos of all these young men and I was just overwhelmed and I felt I had to do something,” she said. “I had to make a statement.” The result is her “Fallen Heroes/Afghanistan,” a conceptual assemblage that includes photos of all those killed in Afghanistan through Dec. 31, 2009. It leaves Westport this week for the U.S. Capitol where it will be displayed in the office of Congressman Jim Himes beginning Nov. 1. One of the project’s major challenges for Siff was keeping track of the death toll, which changed daily. The completed memorial incorporates almost 1,000 portraits which appear on the white stripes of the American flag protected and buried within the red stripes. The red stripes, raised four inches above the surface, are composed of fastidiously torn paper which Siff says communicates “the discipline of a soldier and arousing a feeling of mourning, sacrifice and strength.”

Handwritten text borders the flag, repeating the title of the work – “Fallen Heroes/Afghanistan,” over and over again. Sand on a golden background references the excavation of the “Hidden Treasures” in Kabul dating back to 3,000 B.C. that were recently reintroduced to the world. A layer of golden shell casings, donated by the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, lie below. Siff worked for two years in the studio of her Old Hill area home researching and accumulating the names, ranks, and portraits of the soldiers who appear in her work. It will remain on display in Washington before returning to Connecticut for Siff’s solo September 2012 show, “Elements of Peace,” at Fairfield University. “The experience of creating this work has ennobled my reason for making art and further inspired ‘Elements of Peace,’ the new body of work to which it belongs,” Siff said. “Fallen Heroes” is the third conceptual political work by Siff to receive international attention.

In 2007, she completed “Peace/War,” an abstract painting that paid tribute to the 57 victims of the 1996 suicide bombings in Israel. It was acquired and exhibited in the National Jewish Museum in Washington, DC. In 2009, the National September 11th Memorial Museum selected “The Great Mystery That Surrounds Us” for feature on its Online Gallery. Additionally, Siff has exhibited political works at the gallery that represents her in New York City. Most notable among them is “Tribute,” a painting that references the Purple Heart and pays homage to the soldiers who are serving in Iraq, and “Delta Force,” a watercolor and oil pastel painting created in honor of the military swat team that responded to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Siff has exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the United States and abroad, including the Katonah Museum of Art, NY (2009), the B’nai B’rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum, Washington, DC (1998), the Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, Conn. (1992), and Galerie Musee in Nagoya, Japan (1994).