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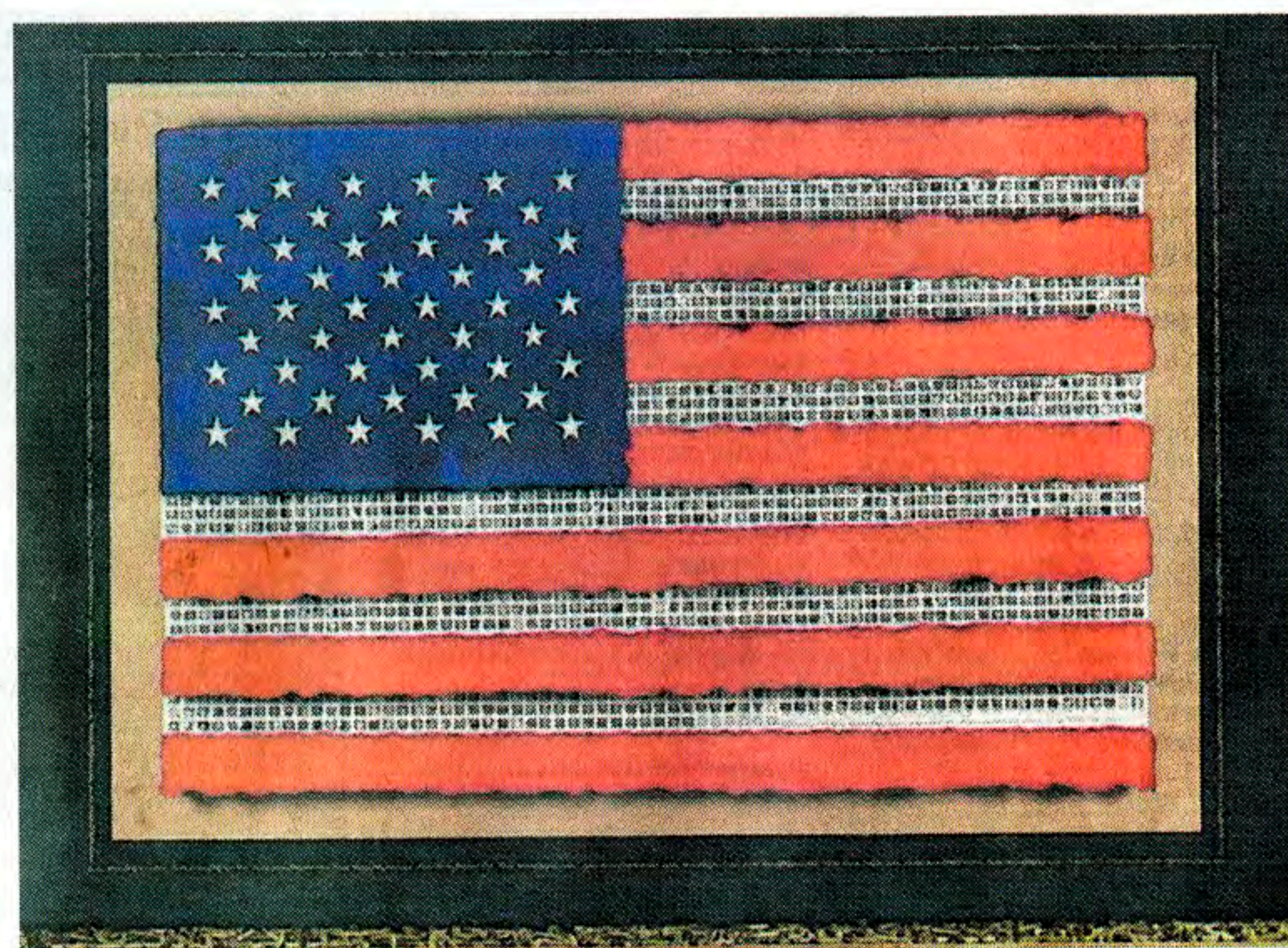
Westport woman an artist with a cause Pulse



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Artist with a cause

ART: WAR, PEACE SUBJECTS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE FOR WESTPORT'S MARLENE SIFF



The artist is now at work on her next solo show, “Elements of Peace,” an exhibition that has been slated for the Thomas J. Walsh Art Gallery at Fairfield University from September through December 2012. The cornerstone of that exhibition will be “Fallen Heroes/Afghanistan,” a large-scale work completed in 2009, which now hangs in Room 119 at the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C., in the offices of U.S. Rep. Jim Himes, D-Conn. At first glance, the mixed-media assemblage, right, appears to be a traditional, albeit stylized, American flag. But a closer look reveals something rather devastating: the flag’s white stripes are fashioned from about 1,000 tiny photographs of every soldier who died in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom through Dec. 31, 2009 — the day she completed the piece. She was so emotionally wrought by the experience of documenting the effects of war that Siff decided her next major project would deal with her hopes for peace.

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AUTUMN DRISCOLL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Artist Marlene Siff works on a piece for an upcoming exhibition at her home studio in Westport.

Siff working on peace art project

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wrought by the experience of documenting the effects of war that Siff decided her next major project would deal with her hopes for peace. Siff then approached Walsh Gallery Director Diana Mille with her concept, and Mille liked what she heard. "Elements of Peace" will include about 40 works, several of which have yet to be completed, with titles such as "Per Aspera ad Astra (Through Thorns to the Stars)," "Unity," "Truth, Politics, Lies," "Humanity," "SOS," "Negotiation (Yes/No)" and "Wing and a Prayer."

The plan she said, is for "Fallen Heroes" to travel from Himes' office to Fairfield for the show and then return to the Capitol in early 2013 — unless a more permanent home for the work can be secured by then.

Siff would like "Fallen Heroes" to someday hang in a museum or government site "where the public could easily visit and be reminded of the sacrifice of all those who died for our freedom and security." (Its selling price is currently listed at \$100,000.)

Born and raised in the Bronx, N.Y., Siff said that "art has always just flowed from my being.

"It just came to me . . . as if I were born with a paintbrush in my hand," she added, laughing.

Following graduation from Manhattan's High School of Music & Art in 1953, she headed for Hunter College, receiving a bachelor of fine arts degree in 1957. What followed was a career as one of America's most popular designers of home furnishings: Her creations adorned towels, sheets, tablecloths, aprons, curtains, dinner plates and drinking glasses. And her original folksy line of artwork, much of it aimed for the kitchen, was mass-produced and distributed around the country.

But in 1980, the desire to return to "serious" art became all-consuming. So with the support of her husband and two sons, Siff made the transition to full-time fine art. In the past 30 years, Siff's work — primarily life-affirming abstract works and those that reflect on the struggles of our time — is included in numerous private and public collections around the country and has been featured in many group and solo shows. Her first political work, "Peace/War," a painting fashioned from torn paper that commemorates the 57 lives lost in five terrorist bombings in Israel in early 1996, is now in the permanent collection of the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C.

The noted British writer and art critic Edward Lucie-Smith com-

pares Siff with two great modern artists, Russian Sonia Delaunay-Terck and her French husband Robert Delaunay, writing that the couple's "work expressed a radiant faith in the future that remained unshaken by world events. I think Marlene Siff's work offers an equivalent, and now rare, optimism about human possibility, and this is one of the things that gives it its special flavor."

Siff said her goal is to communicate a sense of "harmony, balance, order and spirituality" in her work. The imagery depicts personal events and psychological issues, she said, expressed through geometric shapes, color, light, space, texture, edges and movement.

"Being an artist is who I am. If I'm not working, I'm not happy," she said, adding "I feel so blessed to have this outlet to express what I'm about."

The Cannon House Office Building is at the corner of Independence Avenue and 1st Street S.E. on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C. U.S. Rep. Jim Himes' suite, 119 may be contacted directly by calling 202-225-5541. His Bridgeport and Stamford offices may be reached by calling 866-453-0028. Additional information on the artist is available by visiting www.marlenesiff.com.



Artist Marlene Siff, seen above in her home studio in Westport, said her goal is to communicate a sense of "harmony, balance, order and spirituality" in her work.

Artist with a view

Up next: After war memorial, Westport's Siff turns to peace

By Phyllis A.S. Boros
Staff Writer

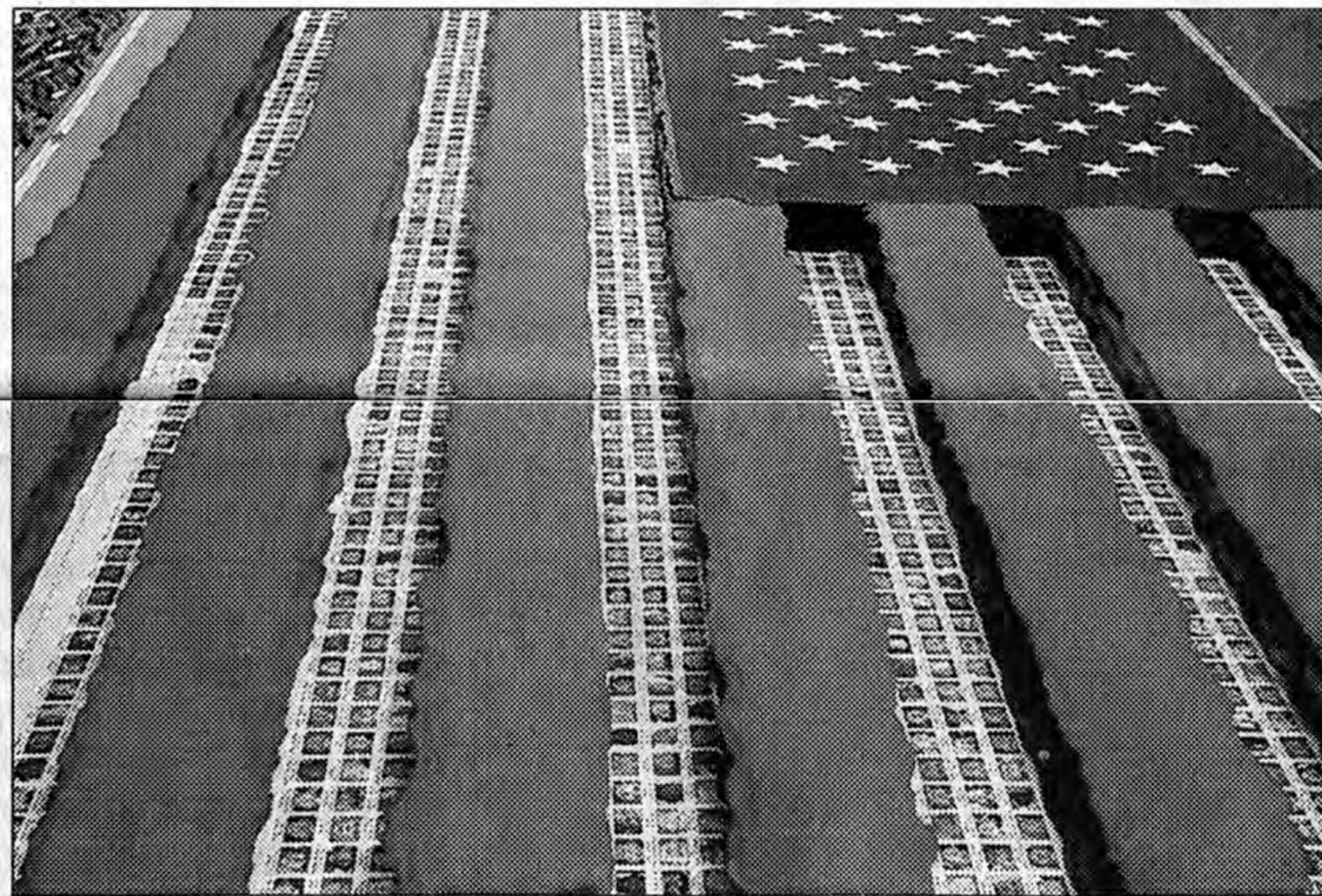
Walking through Marlene Siff's sprawling multi-level Westport home is a lot like touring one of Europe's great house-museums, like Monet's sanctuary in Giverny or Rembrandt's townhome in Amsterdam or Renoir's farmstead in the South of France.

Evidence of a life lived full of passion for one's art is everywhere.

Scores of Siff's colorful, exuberant abstract paintings, mobiles and wall constructions are found throughout the house — in every room and hallway, and even in the lower-level gym — along with hundreds of porcelain treasures and other objets d'art collected through the decades by the artist and her engineer/inventor husband Elliott J. Siff. Huge bouquets of dried hydrangea, all picked from Siff's many summer gardens, add yet another dramatic touch.

In Siff's top-floor studio, running the entire length of the house, the artist is now at work on her next solo show, "Elements of Peace," an exhibition that has been slated for the Thomas J. Walsh Art Gallery at Fairfield University from September through December 2012.

The cornerstone of that exhibition will be "Fallen He-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

"Fallen Heroes/Afghanistan," by Westport artist Marlene Siff, is a large mixed-media assemblage that at a distance looks like a stylized-but-traditional American flag. Up close, however, viewers will encounter a devastating aspect to the work: The flag's six white stripes are composed of about 1,000 tiny photos of every soldier who died in Operation Enduring Freedom through Dec. 31, 2009, when she completed the piece. The work is hanging in the Washington, D.C., office of U.S. Rep. Jim Himes, D-Conn.

roes/Afghanistan," a large-scale work completed in 2009, which now hangs in Room 119 at the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C., in the offices of U.S. Rep. Jim Himes, D-Conn.

At first glance, the mixed-media assemblage appears to be a traditional, albeit stylized, American flag. But a closer look reveals something rather devastating: the flag's white

stripes are fashioned from about 1,000 tiny photographs of every soldier who died in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom through Dec. 31, 2009 — the day she completed the piece.

Siff was motivated to begin the memorial as a response to the "Roster of the Dead" — published by The New York Times on Aug. 7, 2008 — a three-page tribute with the

portraits, names and ranks of all American soldiers who had died to that point.

"I cut the roster out of the paper," Siff recalled. "I remember thinking: 'I have to make a work that represents how I feel at this moment. My first thought was that the flag is the symbol of who we are.'"

So began the project, which 17 months later resulted in a profoundly touching work that includes the photos, names and ranks of the dead, as well as a few faceless portraits representing the hundreds of soldiers who have since died. The flag's red stripes are fabricated from four layers of torn paper (about 4 inches high) painted a deep red. A handwritten text, "Fallen Heroes/Afghanistan," is repeated around the work — measuring approximately 57 inches tall by 77 inches wide by 5 inches deep — in the style of a "homemade prayer." All is placed on a background that's painted gold and covered with sand, referencing the excavation of the "hidden treasures" in Kabul, some dating to 3,000 BCE, that were kept out of harm's way for years by art scholars and recently reintroduced to the world. At the base of the work is a layer of shell casings, donated by the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

She was so emotionally

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