

Mortars Under Tree

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Photograph & Poem, (1992), Courtesy Andrew Godin

Tanka Poetry Accompanying Artwork:

In a perfect world
Trees would bear fruit like apples
Wars raged by man produce fruit
Metal; explosives
Borne from the true poison tree

Description of Artistic Process:

I was medically released from the military in 2006 with an Operational Stress Injury or OSI. More specifically, I was diagnosed with PTSD, Major Depression and Anxiety Disorder. I was hospitalized in a Stress and Trauma treatment facility and was introduced to Art Therapy. Already an avid photographer, I began experimenting with poetry writing and trying to combine both genres. What I came up with was utilizing an ancient Japanese form of poetry called Tanka. Tanka poems consist of 5 lines and a maximum of 31 syllables which are broken down as follows:

5 Syllables

7 Syllables

5 Syllables

7 Syllables

7 Syllables

Tanka poetry is well-grounded in concrete images but also is infused with the intensity and intimacy that comes from the direct expression of emotions. They were often composed as a kind of finale to every sort of occasion; no experience was quite complete until a Tanka had been written about it. For me, it became a vehicle through which I could deal with one specific aspect of my experiences at a time without being overwhelmed by the flood of images and memories associated with my trauma.

This flood, or "Flow State" as I refer to it as, was so intense it would keep me in a state of panic for days or weeks on end. The strict structure of Tanka poetry meant I only had to deal with a

small piece of the puzzle at time allowing me to process and come to terms with it before moving on to the next piece. Over time it became easier to deal with my trauma by chipping away at small pieces of the huge balled up mess I had accumulated during my career. This method of using Tanka poetry to come to terms with my trauma was symbolically my way of completing the career experiences and has allowed me to move forward with life.