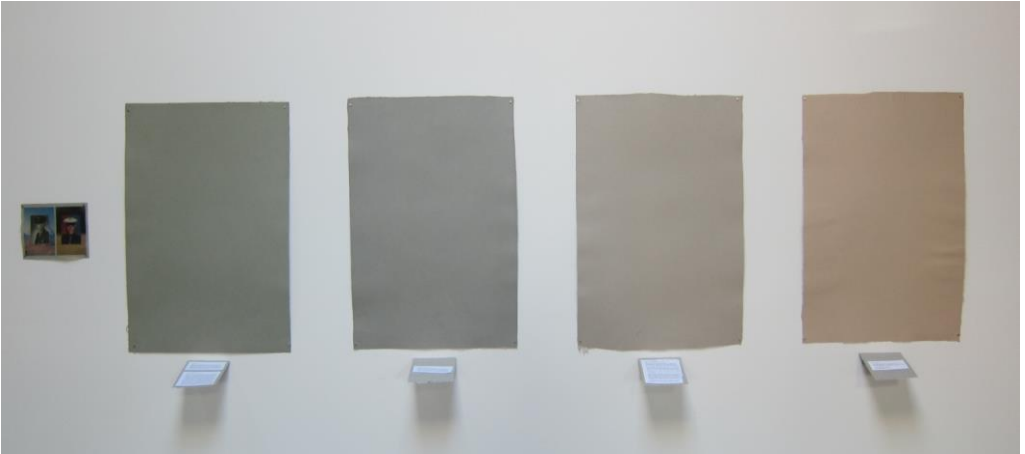


Portraits



Drew Cameron (U.S. Army)



Courtesy Drew Cameron

I began to write and create visual art as I was separating from the military in 2006. Since then I have been on a tireless pursuit to not only investigate my role and responsibilities in the military and warfare but to also provide a creative space for others to do the same.

Description:

In the summer of 2012 I was invited by W.A. Ehren Tool to attend his two-week residency at the Craft and Folk Art Museum in his hometown of Los Angeles. The show, *Production or Destruction*, was a retrospective with a site-specific construction of 1500 new cups. During his stay Ehren set up his ceramic wheel on the street in front of the building and created new work and

engaged with whoever came through. For my part, I spent a three-day weekend with my portable paper mill creating paper with patrons of the museum. His father, David Tool, a retired U.S.



A blend of fibers from uniforms worn by father and son in two different wars. Courtesy of Drew Cameron

Army Colonel, an academic affiliated with University of Southern California and a cultural translator to China had recently returned to Los Angeles and was available for the duration of his son's residency. Because of the fortuitous timing and because of my growing collaborations with Ehren—this began when I relocated to the Bay Area—we planned to create paper from a blend of his and his father's uniforms. David had been

an infantry platoon leader in the Army in Vietnam and Ehren had served as a Marine Corps Military Police officer in Saudi Arabia and Iraq during Desert Storm.

The olive drab jungle fatigues and desert camouflage uniforms were deconstructed and cut into small attentive pieces by Ehren and David, and then mixed together. Unlike most Combat Paper recipes, David's 100% cotton Vietnam uniforms blended with Ehren's 50% cotton and 50% nylon cammies, required no additional stabilizing fibers. Over the course of the weekend David and Ehren created nearly one hundred 9 x 12 inch sheets of paper.

I asked if I could have a small batch of the unused fibers to create a portrait of them. They graciously agreed.

Since 2007 I have worked with hundreds of veterans, directly facilitating the creation of paper from their particular uniforms. For good reason many people are interested in a batch that is specifically their blend of fiber. Yet the opportunity to blend their fibers with those of others is always presented at the workshops, as the intent is to add to a growing lineage of fibers from military uniforms. In addition to the opportunity to blend their fibers with those of others, another thing regularly occurs at the workshops. At some point participants offer the remaining un-pulped uniforms for future workshops. This growing collection of little bags of uniforms—halfway cut apart, a waiting liberation into paper—has come to represent another phenomenon for me, the histories of the people who wore those uniforms as well as the narratives of the fibers. The military uniform itself carries an awesome potential for other kinds of investigation.

For many years the Combat Paper workshop process was the liberation of rag to create paper and the embellishment of the paper with images and text. More recently I have become interested in all of the stories embedded



David Tool and Ehren Tool cutting their uniforms. Courtesy of Drew Cameron

within the fibers. I have struggled for an appropriate way in which to illustrate the variety of stories within the fibers and to find a universal format that would allow equal footing for the viewer and for the participant-creator. I found the inspiration I was seeking in working with David and Ehren Tool.

Coming home from war is a difficult thing. There is often much to account for as a survivor. A new language must be developed in order to express the magnitude and variety of the collective effect. Papermaking has become my language and Combat Paper my form of expression—sharing stories and creating fiber from the remnants of war. The communal and alchemical paper making process inspires temporal conversations woven with remnants and threads of tangential memories. Countless times during these passing moments I have had the honor of hearing “a story never before told.” In the wake of a story first unveiled, how can one veteran help carry forward the story of another?

Creating fiber from the remnants of war and doing it within a group sharing process took on new meaning when I worked with the Tools, two generations of war fighters, and myself, the most recently returned. From the batch of their unused fibers I created a sheet that represents a proper homage of the two of them—father and son. There are five portraits now: W.A. Ehren Tool with his father David Tool, Trent Albee, Sammy Villarreal, David Drakulich, and Anthony Sgroi (his is an American flag).

The portraits are just beginning. For now they are larger than usual and carry the tone and geography of the uniform used in the work. They are from individuals I have directly worked with and

taught how to pulp their uniforms. It is a way for me to offer something back for their offerings—a reciprocity and strength for their story to again be told. It has taken me five years to be comfortable with a large sheet of blank paper hanging on the wall. It is some of the paper that I am most proud of, and I plan to make many more.

22 December 2012



Portraits – W.A. Ehren Tool and David Tool digital image courtesy Drew Cameron

The fibers for this sheet of paper came from a workshop with David and Ehren Tool in Los Angeles, California, from uniforms they wore while deployed in Vietnam and Desert Storm.

Wall Label Text:

W.A. Ehren Tool

When I told my WWII Marine Veteran grandfather I had joined the Marines he laughed and then he said..."They are going to take

your soul." Two years later I was in Kuwait wearing this uniform. One morning the sky to the north was black. As the day went on the blackness got closer until we were in the blackness. None of us knew what was happening. I honestly had the thought that this might really be the end of the world. That I would die in this blackness. It really looked like evil manifest in the physical world. I felt that if I died there I would not be able to escape that evil even in death. It was not the end of the world, for me. All of the vehicles and uniforms that were in the oil fires were stained. I don't think I lost my soul in the war but I think my soul is stained.

David Tool

Beyond patriotism, beyond why governments say they are facing combat, to find inner peace then and afterwards, it is essential that soldiers find within and for themselves deeply personal missions or social/ethical beliefs for which they are willing to make this potential sacrifice of life or limb.



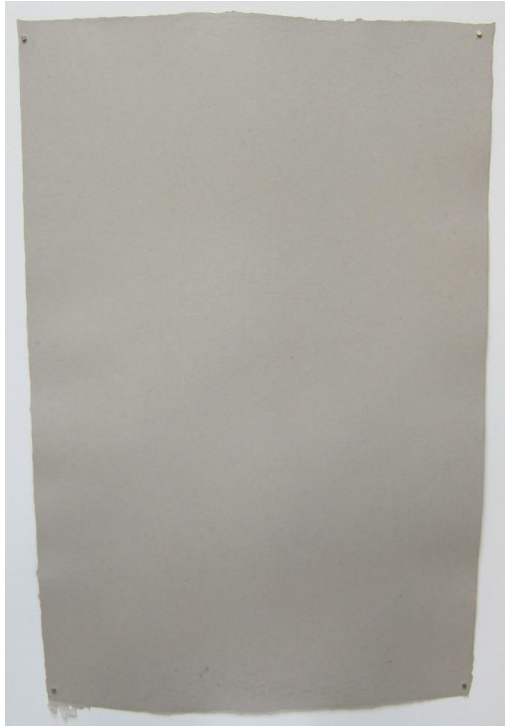
Portrait – Sammy Villereal; digital image courtesy
Drew Cameron

The fibers for this sheet of paper came from a workshop with Sammy in Fullerton, California, using the uniforms that he has described.

Wall Label Text:

Sammy Villarreal

I used a uniform from when I first entered the Marines in the 1990's and one I wore just before I got out 11 years and 8 months later. When people ask me why I got out, I say that I would be a Marine until the day came when I wasn't entirely proud to wear the uniform...



*Portrait – David J. Drakulich; digital image courtesy
Drew Cameron*

The fibers for this sheet of paper came from David's military uniforms, provided by his parents at a workshop in Reno.

Wall Label Text:

David J. Drakulich

David proudly joined the U.S. Army in 2004 after attending Truckee Meadows Community College for two semesters. He served as a forward observer, rifleman, and parachutist and was awarded the Bronze Star for his heroic efforts and sacrifice.

David enjoyed snowboarding as well as listening to rock-and-roll while smoking a pipe or good cigar with his father. He was to complete his third and final tour in May of 2008, and then he looked forward to returning to school in the fall to pursue art. He died for his country in Afghanistan on January 9th, 2008. To commemorate David's passion for art, his parents, Tina and Joe, created the David J. Drakulich Memorial Art Foundation for Freedom of Expression. The DJD Art Foundation built the Veteran Artist Project, which hosts workshops at the Reno VA Hospital. They also procured a grant to form a Combat Paper Mill in Reno, Nevada where they will host ongoing workshops and programming for veterans and their families.



*Portrait – Trent Albee; digital image courtesy
Drew Cameron*

The fibers for this sheet of paper came from a workshop with Trent in Marshalltown, Iowa, and are from a uniform he wore while deployed in Cuba.

Wall Label Text:

Trent Albee

Land was confining, tense, and merciless

I went underwater to stay sane

My escape was at the depths of the ocean floor

It was my abyss of solitude and peace

MA2 Trent Albee (Guard)

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

Oct 2009 – Oct 2010