

PTSD
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Richard Neal (Civilian)



Oil and Mixed Media on Panel (2009), 48 X 64 in., Courtesy Richard Neal

Description:

In 1973 I was a senior in high school with a draft number. When I learned about the end of U.S. military involvement in Viet Nam that year, 40 years ago, I experienced a mixture of relief and guilt. Primarily I felt relief because I would not have to go away to a foreign war zone. But also there were feelings of guilt in the realization that I had only been lucky in avoiding a war in which so many of my generation, over 50,000, had been killed.

We have since switched to a volunteer army, which means that a person's decision to enter the armed services is one's own and not a decision forced upon them. But statistics show that service now falls disproportionately to those of lower socioeconomic levels who have less access to higher education and the possibility for other, higher paid, and less stressful, less dangerous jobs.

During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it was upsetting to learn about the ban on photographs of the flag-draped coffins of our returning war dead, which served to insulate the American public from the true costs of those wars. Equally disturbing is the very high level of post-traumatic stress disorder among current soldiers and veterans. My portrait of a soldier witnessing battle is an attempt as a civilian to bring more awareness in a visual way to the plight of those who have bravely done what is asked of them.