

(un)clothed and in her right mind

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Iris Madelyn (U.S. Marine Corps)



7 Digital Images Stretched on Canvas (Jan. 2012), 12 X 16 X 1/5 in., Courtesy Iris Madelyn,
on loan to the National Veterans Art Museum, Chicago, IL

Description:

(un)clothed and in her right mind came conceptually from a Bible story in the New Testament where a man had been freed from demons. As the townspeople came to see him, they found the man sitting with Jesus, “clothed and in his right mind.” His clothed condition was verification of his sanity and wholeness, and the people found him fit.

That garments confirm our fitness is not a new idea. Clichés like *judging a book by its cover* or *dressing for success* ensure awareness of how we are externally perceived. Military garb, with its adornments and indicators of rank, status, and prestige, is no exception. What I found interesting is the idea that to disrobe from acceptable garments, to question adornments and the prestige with which they are associated, is to seem insane and unwell. In this series of self-portraits, I am challenging that idea and am claiming that, perhaps, the demons exist when we unquestioningly don the garments of uniformity and of social acceptability.

In the military so much of my identity was based on rank and status. While my rank and uniformity protected me from appearing weak and objectionable, at the same time my status created an identity acknowledged only by symbols and insignias. After living out of uniform for a few years, I began to feel unknowable even to myself. In stripping away the symbols with which I identified, I found myself bare and vulnerable. But this same vulnerability allowed me to begin to see who I was outside

the context of symbols without assuming defeat. Through this series of self-portraits I am trying to understand what frames identity, and I am learning to recreate my own.

The disjointedness of the images reflects the times I felt disjointed and disconnected from myself. My identity is partially connected to my military experience, to my gender, age, and ethnicity, and to the intersection of all these identity markers. Through the camera lens I am intentionally disconnecting to find a different perspective from which to examine my garments, my adornments, my skin, and my self, in order to verify my own fitness of mind and to confirm that I, too, have been freed from demons.

We all have stories, memories, joys and pains. These stories are all connected to each other, to the earth, and to the soul of the earth. Poetry and art help me to remember this connection and to remember that life is sacred. We can connect to each other and to the Source and create the world we want to live in. These stories and memories have the potential to seep out of our pores and destroy us, but they have an even more powerful potential to heal us if we only will indulge in their magic.