



The Army and Navy Club is hosting Susan J. Barron's exhibition "Depicting the Invisible: A Portrait Series of Veterans Suffering From PTSD." The photographs will remain on display through April 15, with public hours each Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. (Photo by Jarod Golub)

New portrait exhibit at Army and Navy Club brings veterans' unseen struggles to light

By Jarod Golub — Published on Mar 8, 2019 — Last updated Mar 8, 2019

The abundance of military history and appreciation in DC — from the seemingly endless list of names at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to the captivating fountain display of the World War II Memorial — makes it fertile ground for Susan J. Barron's exhibition *Depicting the Invisible: A Portrait Series of Veterans Suffering From PTSD*.

Barron's series — which features photographs printed on canvas of 15 veterans who live with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) — will be showing at the Army and Navy Club on Farragut Square through April 15.

"This is a very special opening for me because it was in front of military people and the response has been overwhelmingly positive and supportive," said Barron, a painter whose work has been featured across the country from New York to Texas to California. "The admirals and the generals and the senators who are members here are going to bear witness to these stories every day, and I hope that they internalize them and can be inspired to make decisions about our veterans that are positive."

What makes the large-scale photographs particularly distinctive is the text painted into the background: the veterans' stories, in their own words, painted by the artist. It helps bring focus to the broad and daunting topic of PTSD, allowing the visitor to experience each individual's journey without losing sight of the larger theme. The use of black-and-white photography also keeps the viewer's attention squarely on the subject



"Depicting the Invisible: Derek & Phoenix" by Susan J. Barron

matter — veterans with PTSD. By avoiding elements like color or abstract representation that might prove distracting, Barron makes it clear that any one of us could find ourselves in the same circumstances.





The Army and Navy Club on Feb. 15 held a private opening for members that featured a book talk by Charles Newhall III, the author of *Fearful Odds, A Memoir of Vietnam and Its Aftermath* and the subject of Barron's newest portrait. The gallery, located at 901 17th St. NW, will be open to the public Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. while the exhibit is there.



"Depicting the Invisible: Damon" by Susan J. Barron

"I think it can speak to a lot of audiences — veterans and beyond. I think it's really amazing that they're opening it up to the public on Saturdays, which I didn't know about before, and that's a first for the club because it's a private club," member Emma Stein told The DC Line. "PTSD is not only borne by veterans. There are different kinds of trauma that can bring it about, and so that's why I think it will be of interest to a larger community."

PTSD affects people from all walks of life but touches veterans exponentially more. It's a factor that some see as contributing to the overall long-term decline in the number of veterans, which can be seen in recent census data.

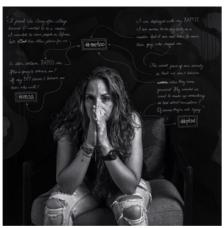
The District of Columbia has actually trended slightly in the opposite direction over the past three years — adding to its appropriateness as a location for Barron's exhibit. Currently,

Census data shows that 30,000 veterans live in the District, making up about 4.3 percent of the city's population, compared with 3.8 percent in 2015.

The decline can be attributed to a number of factors — including fewer people choosing to enlist in the military — but PTSD, which, according to the National Institutes of Health, impacts about 7.7 million American adults, cannot be ruled out, as it is a major factor in veteran suicides.

"I was heartbroken that this is happening in our country every day," Barron said. "Think about it: it's 22 veterans every day who are killing themselves. It's just so unacceptable. So that just sent me on this journey to shed a light on this epidemic and give these veterans a voice and try to make a difference."

Barron's journey connected her with veterans from across the country — a connection that did not end when she stopped photographing them.

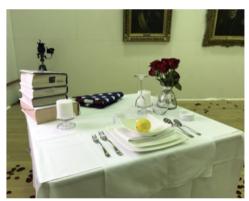


"Depicting the Invisible: Rena" by Susan J. Barron

"We lost one of the veterans of this portrait series. That was such a gut wrench," Barron said. "I naively thought, 'That could never happen, I know these guys.' His story is the story that we're telling. PTSD can affect anybody."







"Table for the Fallen" features a camera that records people sitting down to write a message to a deceased veteran. (Photo by Jarod Golub)

In honor of Damon Ziegler, the veteran who died after being photographed for the exhibit, Barron has included a section called "Table for the Fallen," where a camera records visitors sitting down to write a message to a deceased veteran in a bound journal.

A coffee-table book of Barron's photographs is for sale at the exhibit. Proceeds go to veterans organizations.

Despite the difficult subject matter, there is still an element of hope in some of the stories told by the veterans.

In his portrait, specialist Ken Weinert discussed keeping a positive outlook by celebrating his "alive day" — when he knew he had survived his tours of duty — along with his birthday. It's a sentiment shared by specialist Dortrie Jones

Jr., who began "living every day to the fullest" after he almost died three times.

Barron's newest subject, Newhall, likewise tries to see the upside to the struggles that each of them face.

"I believe you can beat PTSD," Newhall said during the event. "I believe you can turn PTSD into a very positive influence in your life."