

ICONS | RESIDENT



Artist Susan J. Barron was shocked to learn that every day, 22 U.S. veterans commit suicide, mainly due to post-traumatic stress disorder. “That is the official United States government number,” she says, adding that many veterans believe the rate is underreported.

Veterans & PTSD

That heartbreaking statistic inspired her newest project, a portrait series of veterans suffering from PTSD titled “Depicting the Invisible.” Barron spent nearly two years traveling around the country listening to the veteran’s stories and photographing them.

“They leave children and wives behind, and families are destroyed,” she says. “And to see them survive the hell of war to come back and die on the streets of their own hometown was a story that I needed to tell.”

Often, she was allotted 15 minutes to speak with a veteran, and two hours later they’d still be telling her their story. “I felt like they feel silenced; they want to be heard, they want there to be awareness around this. They have entrusted me with their stories, and I’m very grateful to them.”

The Portraits

The 6x6-foot portraits are mixed-media works consisting of photographic imagery, paint, and text. Each veteran makes direct eye contact with the viewer, and the text tells his story in his or her their words.

“I wanted to project that the invisible wounds of war are just as devastating if not more so than the physical wounds of war. The physical wounds of war, we see it, we get it, we have doctors that can fix that. You can see that they’re wounded, and you understand that they require support. But with the invisible wounds of war, with PTSD, people come back and they look perfectly fine, but they are not getting the support they need.”

Part of the mission is to try to bring some support, so Barron has created a coffee table book of the works, with proceeds going to veterans’ groups.

The Pencil Promise

Barron, who previously had successful careers in branding and advertising at BBDO and Saatchi & Saatchi, and later as creator of Realsite at Cushman & Wakefield, came to the PTSD project through a series of lifechanging experiences. After a trip to Cambodia in 2009, she founded The Pencil Promise that helped give children in third world countries

access to education. Later, she expanded that project to military bases in the U.S. after learning that many military families live below the poverty line and can’t afford school supplies for their children. It was working with those military families that she learned about the problem of PTSD-related suicide.

HG Contemporary Gallery

Her gallery, HG Contemporary in NYC, embraced her project and will open the show in time for Veterans Day when they will host a reception for the veterans who participated in the project.

During the exhibit, there will be a performance piece called “Table of the Fallen” in which anybody who wants to honor one of the fallen may sit at a table and say the name of the person while being videotaped for use in the exhibition.

Table of the Fallen

For the duration of the exhibit, there will be a performance piece called “Table of the Fallen” in which anybody who wants to honor one of the fallen may sit at a table and say the name of the person. This will be videotaped and will run at the gallery as more are added. ♦

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