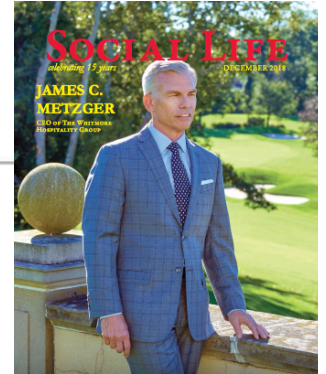


ART

## SUSAN J. BARRON

### DEPICTING THE INVISIBLE

By BENNETT MARCUS



The artist Susan J. Barron was shocked to learn that every day 22 U.S. veterans commit suicide, mainly due to PTSD. “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 veterans’ 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 6-foot by 6-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 quotes his or her story.

“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 her works, with proceeds going to Freedom Fighter Outdoors.

#### THE PENCIL PROMISE

Barron, who previously had successful careers in branding and advertising, came to the PTSD project through a series of lifechanging experiences. After a trip to Cambodia in 2009, she founded The Pencil Promise, which 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. Working with military families made her aware of the problem of PTSD-related suicide.

#### HG CONTEMPORARY GALLERY

HG Contemporary in Chelsea, owned by Phillippe Hoerle-Guggenheim, is the gallery that represents Barron. The gallery embraced her project and opened the show in time for Veterans Day. During the exhibition, which ran through November 26, the performance piece *Table of the Fallen* allowed any gallery guest to honor one of Barron’s subjects by sitting at a table and saying the name of one of the veterans she had photographed, which was videotaped and shown throughout the exhibition. HG Contemporary brought the pieces to Aqua Art Miami during Art Basel Miami, December 5 to 9. [susanjbarron.com](http://susanjbarron.com)

**R. Couri Hay**

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