

Veterans Find Peace by Making Art

BY CARI HACHMANN

THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

"I live with the war every day," said Daniel Shea of Veterans for Peace and curator of A Tenacity of Hope, an art exhibit at Portland State University. "Everyday it's in my head and I can't erase it, but when I do this [art] I forget about it."

Using art as a path to healing, veterans from World War II to Vietnam to present day Iraq and Afghanistan displayed their work in conjunction with a four-day Veterans for Peace convention held last weekend in Portland.

In neat rectangular frames, disturbing and beautiful images and paintings by men and women who once marched into combat and the living hell of war were splashed across the white walls of the Littman Gallery.

Each artist told different stories of combat, but all the veterans shared the common resistance to war.

Bill Bires, an elderly man once drafted into the Korean War, said the art clearly illustrates the uselessness of resorting to violence to solve problems.

"Art gives them the opportunity to tell their story," said Shea, who displayed two, big colorful works in the show. As an escape, a distraction, "the process took me away from things that plagued my mind."

Shea is a Vietnam veteran and

agent orange victim. He said he became a war resister after he lost his three-year old son to heart disease, cleft palate and other abnormalities as a consequence to prior chemical warfare exposure.

Like many returning soldiers, he felt betrayed by the U.S. government. "They sent us to kill or be killed and there was a price to pay for that," he said.

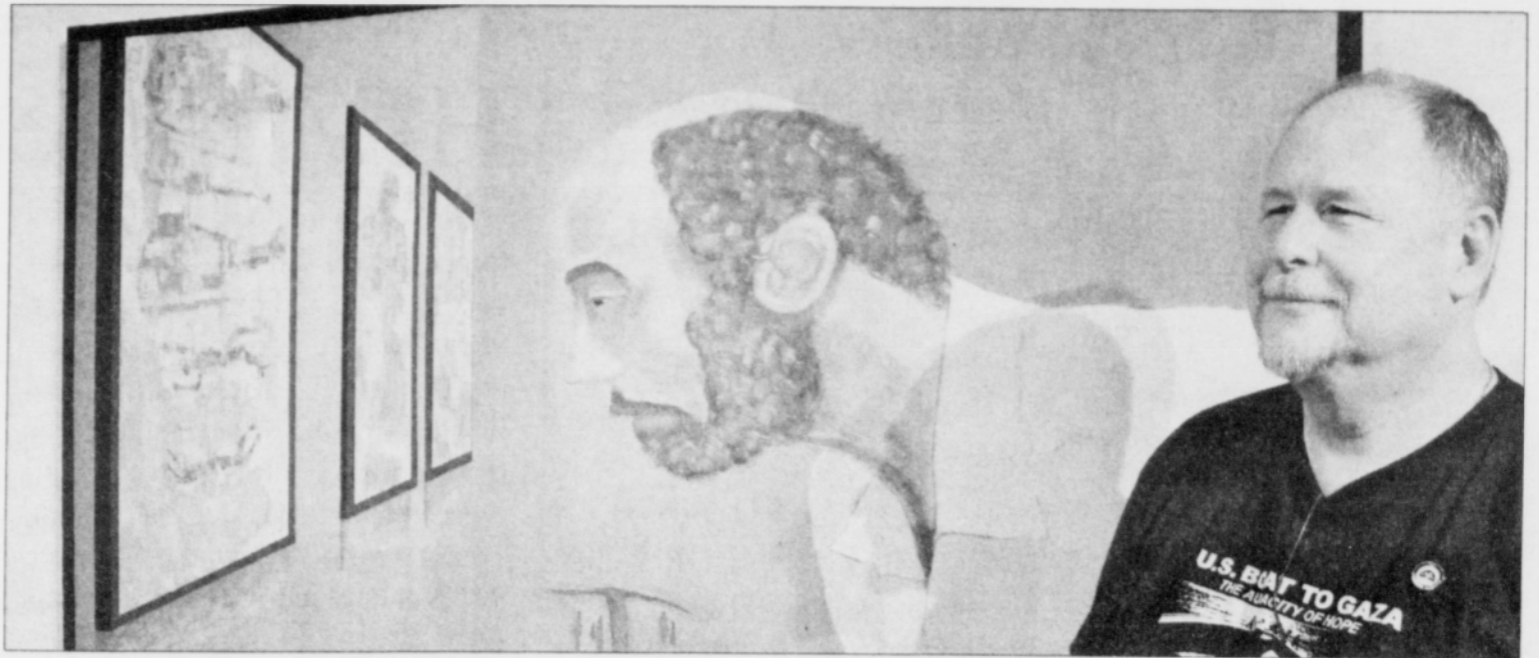
As visitors and locals gazed into the exhibit's images of mayhem contrasted with vibrant colors of blood, bombs exploding, arid landscapes,



A soldier with flowers as illustrated by Tomer Hanuka.

child soldiers, and guns shooting red flowers, other Veterans for Peace members wandered in from a day of seminars and workshops.

Michael Marceau of Kensington, Md., who was critically injured in a



"We are all wounded in some form," said Veterans for Peace artist Daniel Shea. His painting, Wounded Reflections: a Portrait of Dave Cline, portrays the former president of Veterans for Peace and founder of the Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility group.

1970 rocket attack, said he resists war by enlightening students about the "reality of life in the military."

Though he is committed to non-violence, his enemies are the recruiters who lure kids into joining the military with unrealistic education opportunities and false, romanticized visions of war.

"Recruiters are like salesmen," he said, "They tell you everything, but the true costs of war," said Marceau.

Like other Veterans for Peace, he advocates "to end these illegal wars".

For the survivors, returning home from war is another hell of its own; whether suffering from physical injuries or post traumatic stress disorder, the path to peace is not an easy one.

Most often, former soldiers find refuge with those who served beside them and other comrades of war, where they can remember the good things; the people met along

the journey, broadening their knowledge of other cultures, art, religion, language, and their strength against such adversity.

The Veterans for Peace advocates say soldiers that will return home from Iraq and Afghanistan should look forward to being embraced by a community that is willing to hear their story, without judgment.

"This is hope," said Shea.

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