

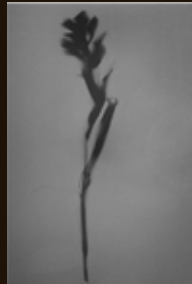
This War Between Us

Elizabeth Mellott



This War Between Us is an expansive consideration of the ordeal of military families and their stories of pain, stress, and faithful dedication. The consequences of this war are deeply present to me every day.

Elizabeth Mellott



January 17 to February 15, 2008

Artist Talk:

Wednesday, February 13, 6pm

Closing Reception:

Friday, February 15, 5pm to 7pm

Entering the world of Elizabeth Mellott's work through the small portal of a darkened window is a deeply personal and moving journey. Black shadow boxes follow one after another in a long punctuated line. The photographic and sculptural scenes within emanate a sorrow, a longing, and a desire to understand. Complex feelings are distilled down to a singular scene in which simple elements correspond to an intricate emotional landscape. We are invited into each one individually;



the scale and approach of the work initiates a solitary experience. So close, we are in immediate intimacy with each piece, brought in for a quiet moment of contemplation.

Elizabeth Mellott tells us about war and the consequent tearing apart of relationships. She draws from her own raw experience, yet delivers it to us in a universal human language, that of concern for family and loved ones. We all feel sorrow, loss, absence and anxiety. Moving through her work we are not presented with a voice of authority or historical expertise, but one that finds our common denominator. This is precisely why the work of Elizabeth Mellott is so powerful.

In times of conflict, how does an artist participate? In the luxury of daily life in this country, how easily we can forget that there is global violence and suffering. Reducing the effects of war to statistics and numbers fails to reflect that it is actually about real people, about pain, loss, and damage. The individual story of Mellott's work holds evidence of her own perseverance through difficulty. She asks us in turn to do the simple task of pausing and considering. She reveals the distillation of her experience into a visual form, loosely calling to mind the memorial that signifies and honors the memory of things lost.

Conversations with the artist tell of the manner in which she works. The dialogue between her and her husband is deeply influential in the creation of the pieces, as is his continual absence and her effort to comprehend the reality of his situation; first, as he is deployed in Afghanistan and later in Iraq. She intimates that perhaps we overestimate the emotional pain a person can endure.

Sleeping, in three scenes so similar yet with minute variations, imitates the ordinary events of everyday life. The cyclical nature of wake, sleep, wake, sleep becomes a profound daily occurrence that in times of strife and anxiety offers no peaceful rest. *A Hero's Welcome Home* addresses those returning home with no one to greet their arrival. Two rows of delicately suspended sticks facing one another perfectly line the interior of the darkened box. They stand straight, and are so stiff and brittle they may break in the first gust of wind.

The photographic prints *Interstices* initially appear to be a quiet series of floral still lives. We discover these flowers are gifts from her husband upon his return visits home. During their time apart the flowers wither and die. She collects them; pressing the petals and leaves onto light sensitive paper and exposing to the sun's rays for the duration of his absence. The flowers and their physical connection to the paper result in the silhouetted image, taking on a new significance that Mellott describes as "a typology of repetitive periods of loneliness."

Elizabeth Mellott's work expresses the deep pain and grief endured as the result of war. As viewers we are given the chance to step aside from the trivialities of our own lives and consider, for this moment, war's consequences.

Tomiko Jones

Guest Curator, Union Gallery

MFA candidate, School of Art, The University of Arizona

January, 2008



This War Between Us

After learning how to live in a marriage of separation circumscribed by the stress of military life, I recognized that my struggle mirrored that of other combat soldiers and their families. The death toll of the soldiers always hangs in the air, while the grief of lost friends constantly reminds me how close that statistic is to me personally. When watching the soldiers and their attempts to deal with the constant pressures they are under, it becomes impossible for me not to suffer with them. Stage-like boxes were created to portray and interpret situations unfolding in the lives of various young soldiers and their families. Each piece is a small, phantasmagoric scene of images I imagined or dreamed after stories conveyed by my husband or his friends, or featured in the news. The Middle East and the reality of combat are mysterious and foreign to me. Therefore, imagination inspires the creation of stage sets and props to go along with the verbal stories; each box contains an individual tale that represents my personal interpretation of the stories and events surrounding these soldiers. Along with the concerns of the war my existence is comprised of a constant waiting, counting, and worrying, framed by a sum experience of solitude and desolation.

– Elizabeth Mellott

Elizabeth Mellott received her Master of Fine Arts in Photography (2005) from the University of North Texas and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography (2000) from Texas Women's University. Her studies focus on photography, sculpture, and bookmaking. Currently she is a professor of photography at Collin County Community College in Plano, Texas.

Images: left, *The Long Hike Back*, 2005; right, *Sleeping II*, 2005; opposite page, *Interstices V, III, I*, 2005 from *This War Between Us*, silver gelatin prints, mixed media

All images courtesy of the artist

Design: Tomiko Jones. Assistance: Misha Harrison, Roula Seikaly

Union Gallery

Student Union Memorial Center

3rd Floor, NE corner

The University of Arizona

Tucson, AZ 85721

Monday through Friday 11am-5pm, Saturdays 12-4pm

Exhibitions and events are free and open to the public

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