

Women's
Center for Ethics in Action

in alliance with men

WOMEN ON WAR PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

Donna De Cesare, children of conflict in Central America

Ruth Fremson, New York Times

Leslie Fratkin, creator, Sarajevo Self Portrait: The View from Inside

Maggie Foskett, fine arts photographer

Judith Ellis Glickman, Holocaust Series

Barbara Goodbody, curator/photographer, Echoes Across the Himalayas: Tibetan Children in Exile

Katarina Weslien, new media artist

Curators' Statement

Just as death is part of life, so, sadly, are wars and all the artifacts of destruction that accompany them.

Do women photographers capture aspects of war differently than men? See for yourself. These six women photographers are each unique, as different from one another in their aesthetic technique as one gender is from the other. What each of these artists convey in common is the *mystery of war*.

War involves killing and so much more. Topics as big as politics, philosophy, history, the ethics of right and wrong all surface in wars along with the more down-to-earth facts of survival, wounds, hurt, fear, grief, loss and looting, and above all change -- flattened buildings, butchered landscapes, fractured visions and crumpled futures for women, men and children. All these subjects can be found in the photographs of this exhibition.

Donna De Cesare offers a most improbable combination – a dove and a gun, peace and war, a little girl gently stroking a bird as a weapon lies matter-of-factly nearby. This photograph has so many nuances.

Ruth Fremson's photographs are in full color, centrally about people. These beautifully composed portraits, from the most recent wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East, make us ask questions. Why does the woman appear to leap capriciously into a trough with what looks like currency? And is she being followed? Why do these figures sleep in the desert? Is that looting going on with Saddam's portrait in the background?

Leslie Fratkin works in black and white to make photographs that are eerie, elegant and intimate studies of the images of war, in this case from Bosnia, nearly a decade ago. There is mystery here too. How does the encrusted key symbolize Hotel Europa? How odd to see PEACE on what is presumably a Sarajevo wall? Where is the sniper or alley in this sun-dappled picture that seems the epitome of a serene European boulevard?

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Maggie Foskett's photographs are not quite photographs in the usual sense. Soldiers from three countries stand in front of Maxim's in Paris at the end of World War I. The feminine torso looms behind these soldiers, connected in almost a supernatural, haunting way. Other photographs are composites of the ephemera of wartime. And one, *Wound* is an abstracted evocation of bright red blood and decomposition, life collapsed.

The *Bohusovice Station* and the *Gas Valves Crematorium* evoke a sense of doom, despair, tragedy, evil. Black and white and shades of gray in these haunting photographs by Judy Ellis Glickman create a lonely nightmare scenario as if you suddenly find yourself in a bleak place where everyone else has been killed.

Barbara Goodbody's portrait of this Tibetan boy just after his trek over the rugged Himalayas, the loss of his parents and his arrival at the Tibetan Homes School captures a sense of soul in his direct, fragile, vulnerable and yet powerfully hopeful face.

Katarina Weslien juxtaposes Mohammed Atta's eyes from his passport photo with a string of text to suggest the psychological state of this 9/11 instigator who could commit an act of war, of terror, of suicide, of huge, incalculable human passion.

Each of these artists is concerned with wars' myriad details. Yet their compositions arouse our emotions and raise questions we cannot answer. If the medium is the message, there are a lot of unknowns here. Dozens of mysteries but no answers about the reasons for war, the winners and losers, the victims, the spoils, the rights and wrongs. The richness of these photographs forces us in the end to contemplate one of life's ultimate mysteries – what is the logic of life anyway?

I wish to thank Kevin Callahan, my colleague and co-curator/preparator extraordinaire as well as Mal Johnson of the International Association of Women in Radio and Television, and Florence Howe of the Feminist Press.

A Traveling Exhibition, eight venues to date.

Anne B. Zill, *Women's Center for Ethics in Action*