

BREAKING BARRIERS

 *ME, MYSELF AND EYE* 

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INTRODUCTION

Me, Myself and Eye is an online presentation of sixty-seven photographs created by twenty-three military veterans who participated in the *Breaking Barriers* 2020 photography workshop. The workshop, led by artist Selina Román and assisted by artist Christian Cortés, focused on memory and personal experiences that were expressed through a broad interpretation of self-portraiture. Due to COVID 19, the workshop was conducted virtually, and each artist created photographs with their own cellphone cameras. These original and inventive images tell personal stories and express the interior landscape of each artist, without always sketching a physical likeness. *Me, Myself and Eye* presents these personal and individual voices to both the local and larger civilian and veteran communities.

Veterans and their families face many challenges related to war and deployment. As a result of their service, many veterans cope with physical, and often invisible conditions, which affect not only service members but also their spouses, children, extended families and friends. It can be difficult to find words to articulate these hidden conditions, and to express internal thoughts and feelings which escape everyday language. *Breaking Barriers* offers participants an opportunity to communicate visually and develop a voice through artmaking.

I would like to thank all twenty-three of the artists represented in this catalogue for their bravery in service but also for their bravery in undertaking a new creative endeavor. I deeply admire their courage to venture into unknown territories. It is nothing short of heroic to plunge into the art world, and to learn a visual language while being both behind and in front of the lens. We thank them for sharing parts of their selves and their stories with us, the viewers.

I would also like to thank the USFCAM team who worked diligently to make this catalogue and *Me, Myself and Eye* a reality amidst the challenges of a global pandemic. Thank you to Noel Smith, the Deputy Director of USFCAM, for all of her editing wizardry, guidance and support. To Selina Román and Christian Cortés for their knowledge, artistic visions, and organization, by which they led the participants to shatter their glass ceilings. To Don Fuller and Martha de la Cruz, CAM's media team, for all of their graphic genius in creating the program's publicity, social media, and most of all, this catalogue. To Tony Palms, Eric Jonas and Vincent Kral for their framing and installation expertise. To Ashley Jablonski, an enthusiastic and diligent partner, and an ally to all of the participants. To our community partner The James A. Haley Veterans Hospital, specifically Merrilee Jorn and Jason Lind, who have helped us improve the program and who will exhibit *Me, Myself and Eye* at the hospital in 2021. To Wally Wilson, the Director of USF School of Art and Art History, and Forrest MacDonald for their printing collaboration. I would also like to thank the USF Office of Veterans Success for their continuing support; specifically Dr. Larry Braue, Director; Jason Miller, Associate Director; and Kenneth Nahrwold, Veterans Support Coordinator / Development Officer.

I am immensely grateful to our funders. *Breaking Barriers* is made possible by the Community Arts Impact Grant Program of the Arts Council of Hillsborough County, Love IV Lawrence 2020 Waves of Change Grant, and additional support from the ACE Arts for Community Engagement Fund and the Florida Department of State.

LESLIE ELSASSER
Curator of Education
USF Contemporary Art Museum

Breaking Barriers is an initiative created and offered by USF Contemporary Art Museum to expand access to the arts for military personnel, veterans, and their families. *Breaking Barriers* offers veterans the opportunity to have a voice through art-making, and interface and integrate with both the local civilian and broader veteran community. This, in turn, can change the culture of the "silent veteran," into a storyteller, a witness, and amplify veteran voices.





MIND CURRENTS

How well do we know ourselves? Can a photograph tell us anything about a person? These are questions I always ask of portraiture—and the answers elude me, creating a journey I've been on for years. I love photographing people, trying to reveal elements of their personality (not an easy endeavor). But what happens when you turn the camera on yourself? In my current work, I am not only the artist, but also the subject. Although I avoided it for years, this new approach has been freeing artistically and psychologically.

In this edition of *Breaking Barriers*, I wanted students to mine their memories and personal experiences to create meaningful, layered photographs: self-portraits via cell phone camera. I wanted students to get the most out of the myriad features on the camera phone. These powerful cameras and their small size allow for interesting angles and effects that larger cameras do not possess. On the other hand, these cameras have significant limitations; however, those limitations forced students to be more inventive.

Self-portraits just may be the most difficult approach in artmaking—both logistically and mentally. To turn the camera on ourselves takes a good deal of bravery, for in these images we are revealing ourselves in more ways than one. We looked at several different approaches to self-portraiture, and the students jumped into each assignment with enthusiasm and curiosity. I cannot express how proud I am of the *Breaking Barriers* students. Their work was thoughtful, beautiful and engaging.

SELINA ROMÁN

Artist and *Breaking Barriers* Instructor



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MICHAEL BALL

★US MARINES & US AIR FORCE

Lake Ann

I have always been interested in photography, especially images of architecture and landscapes. I traveled a lot in the military and continue to travel with my family. Travel offers opportunities to discover and photograph architectural and natural wonders. When our family returns from a trip, my wife, myself, and two stepsons have a friendly competition. We compete for the "best photograph" as a memory of our trip. The winner of this familial competition prints their enlarged image on canvas and the photograph is proudly placed on our travelogue wall.

I took *Breaking Barriers* to learn new techniques, hoping to improve my travel photographs. However, the theme of this year's workshop was self-portraiture. Self-portraiture was completely out of my comfort zone. Consequently, I experimented with ways of taking self-portraits in which I was not the apparent subject.

One steamy hot summer day in northern Virginia, I visited Lake Ann. While crossing a footbridge, I leaned over the banister and saw my image fused with the images of the clouds and the trees reflected on the water's surface. The color of the lake created a monochromatic image that unified the land, sky, and an echo of myself. Suddenly, a droplet of water fell onto the lake and created a ripple of concentric circles that distorted the image. *Lake Ann* is my distorted self-portrait. Although the photograph looks monochromatic, there is a barely perceivable fluctuation of color that I left as a hint to myself and the clothes that I wore. I hardly edited the photograph. I lightened it slightly to reveal the nuances that almost imperceptibly distinguished one image from another.

MICHAEL BALL

US MARINES 89-93 & US AIR FORCE 00-13





TC BRYANT

★ US ARMY

Dad's Hat

I took photography classes thirty or forty years ago in Wisconsin, and I wanted to start taking pictures again. In Wisconsin, I used a view camera and we had to develop the film. Unlike today's digital cameras that can take infinite pictures or make immediate edits when developing film you only get one chance to take that perfect picture and you have to get it right the first time. It's not like digital. I've used a digital camera before, but this was the first time I used a cell phone camera for artwork that was meant to be shown.

In Wisconsin I learned techniques, such as composition, contrast, line, pattern etc. For this self-portrait *Dad's Hat*, I went outside and recalled all that I had learned. Regardless of the fact that I was using a camera phone, I thought about the angle of the camera that made me look taller, the balanced composition, the converging lines and the pattern created by the bricks. I took the picture as if it was my one chance to get the picture right. I did not edit this image.

The hat is my Dad's hat. He died in 1993. It's one of the things I took when my Dad passed away. I'm originally from Alabama and came to Florida in 1983. My Dad never came to Florida. But the hat is with me in Florida. It is the first time I put it on since he died. Otherwise, It's usually just sitting in the closet. I wanted to remember my Dad, make a self-portrait and a good picture.

TC BRYANT

US ARMY





LARRY BUSBY

★ US NAVY

Marina Blues

My love of water began when I was a toddler. My father and uncles took me into a spring fed creek near my grandmother's farm to teach me to swim. I took to the water immediately and began to enthusiastically doggy paddle as my mother looked on with a not so happy face. I guess that is why I joined the Navy and where my love of all things nautical began.

This photo was taken in my Florida room at my condo overlooking a marina. I wanted a self-portrait with a sunrise but due to poor weather I decided to create my own but from the inside looking out. This is my happy place surrounded by all things nautical. You can see my wooden ship collection, ships in a bottle, old bottles collected while beach combing, antique binoculars, a fish tank and various other sundries.

I enjoy taking this workshop because I am old school. I attended the Naval School of Photography in 1978. After the navy I put my camera down professionally. I picked up photography again as a form of therapy to deal with my alcohol addiction. For me it is meditation: when I get behind the lens time comes to a standstill, before I know it hours have passed in what seemed like only minutes. I become so focused on creating photographic art the noise in my head goes away.

I wanted to bring myself up to the 21st century. I truly knew little about the digital age regarding photography. These classes have been a godsend as I would not have been able to afford workshops of this highly professional and knowledgeable caliber. I keep coming back because I always learn something new or relearn something forgotten over time.

LARRY BUSBY

US NAVY





DAVID CANADAY

★ US ARMY

Ghost Walk

I initially signed up for *Breaking Barriers* with the goal of improving upon an undeveloped photography skill set. A large part of my current job in the Army involves travel and I wanted to get better at taking photos of the various places I was assigned to. The *Breaking Barriers* course has challenged me to see the world in different ways. Prior to starting this work, I viewed photography as a way to capture memories. While accurate, this understanding did not encompass the full communication potential of a purposefully shot photograph. One thing I quickly learned is that I could go beyond a flat image that freezes a particular point in time and instead use some of these images to convey deeper thoughts and emotions.

As I look back over my work it sparks some interesting introspection into different thoughts I had while shooting the photos and the various emotions and memories they conjured inside me upon reflection. I took this image, *Ghost Walk*, as part of an assignment that challenged us to take portraits using abstraction and obstruction. I took the *Ghost Walk* photo using a slow shutter app on my cellphone. With the help of a friend, I took these photos from several angles, however I ended up settling on the one displayed because the movement started and stopped cleanly within the wooden frame. This image made me think of the transient nature of army life as it must appear to our civilian counterparts. A life in which you can be randomly posted to a new location; to “appear” one day out of thin air, only to “disappear” a year or two or three later, as though you never were there at all in the first place.

DAVID CANADAY
US ARMY





MICHAEL CONGDON

★ US ARMY

Fragmented

Fragmented is an attempt to portray how I feel as I cope with various mental health issues. When I medically retired from the Army, I felt broken and lost. I felt broken from various traumas and lost being a civilian for the first time in sixteen years. It seems that during that time pieces of me shifted both inside and out. As I sought help to deal with my mental health, it felt as if more fragments were made. At the time, I didn't feel that the new fragments were actually for my good. I was and still am resistant to change, thus to creating a new shift or fragment of myself. When the resistance ends I hope to be at peace with these fragments or join them together in a new better version of my former self.

This is my third year taking the *Breaking Barriers* workshop and I hope to take more in the future. It is a solid program that brings in top notch contemporary artists to teach. One of the best parts is each instructor wants to be here. They are giving freely of their time to help veterans learn or sharpen a skillset that is beneficial for a lifetime. The instructors and the people keep bringing me back year after year. There are fellow artists in the program that I have known for two and three years now which is amazing.

MICHAEL CONGDON

US ARMY





BRANDIE DZIEGIEL

★ US COAST GUARD

Still Life

Still Life is inspired by feelings of vulnerability and contemplation. As someone who is always planning for the future, it's been extremely challenging to remain optimistic about tomorrow with all the chaos happening in this world. Between the pandemic, political upheaval, racial injustice, job insecurity, climate change, etc., this year has been filled with uncertainty. It's made me worried. Like I'm trapped in a moment of stasis. Like I have no control. The cellophane represents these fears and looming danger. The 'self' represents human perseverance and constraint. This image reflects the period of rumination I experienced this past summer. A period of time I spent wrestling with control, intuition, and hyper-awareness. A period of time that not only forced me to thoughtfully reflect but forced me to understand the importance of living in the moment because this moment is all that's promised.

I am an artist who works primarily in printmaking. It's an incredibly intensive process so I often turn to my camera as an alternative creative outlet. I took this workshop to gain more formal knowledge about photography and expand my understanding of my own process. Going into it, I realized I have natural creative tendencies that I often revert to when taking photographs, especially when photographing myself. I wanted to push my own boundaries and go outside my comfort zone. I almost always plan for what I'm photographing or creating—I rarely create spontaneously. My work is heavily filled with narrative and symbolism which means everything has meaning and purpose. This workshop re-introduced 'play' into my practice by asking participants to incorporate conventional everyday items in unconventional ways into our self-portraits. *Still Life* is first a self-portrait I've taken on a whim with only readily available materials.

There was no planning and no intention. It caught me by surprise because it totally conveys my feelings at that time, which isn't something I thought was possible with little to no planning. Not only did I underestimate the roles of abstraction and creative spontaneity in photography, but I also underestimated the power of using only my cell phone and a simple material like cellophane. Taking this workshop has totally enhanced both my photography and printmaking processes in the way that it's expanded my understanding of the possibilities of meaning-making. It's not only possible to create meaningful work without intention, but that work can perhaps speak more greatly to our intuition than any amount of planning and contextualization could.

BRANDIE DZIEGIEL
US COAST GUARD





LORETTA FIELDS

★ US ARMY

The year 2020

In the sixty-nine years I have lived on this earth, I have never seen so much turmoil over the various political viewpoints and out-right language used by a president of the United States. I lived through the racism, name calling and information presented in the media and other forms of communication. When I was young there was not as much exposure to politics like there is today due to our modern technology. Most actions were hidden and you never heard much about these secrets that are currently exposed. In the area where I grew up in Northern Virginia, we had little exposure to many things because it was a small town. The town is located thirty miles west of Washington, DC. Growing up, our families were not taught about the difference of the color of your skin—we just got along with everyone. It was about love, faith and community. The neighborhood consisted of my grandparents, uncle, aunts and cousins. We all lived on one gravel road, that finally got paved after I graduated from high school and moved away in 1969. In the area where I lived there were social justice and civil right issues including The Great March on Washington, that was held in D.C. on Wednesday, August 28, 1963. My father, who is ninety-two years old and still living, and my older brother, both marched in Washington on that day.

The self-portrait is me pondering what the world has to offer during the current pandemic of COVID-19 including the social and racial unrest and the election of a new president. Where do we go from here? I wanted to show how a sixty-nine-year-old woman looks after serving the Federal Government and the US Army with a total of thirty-six years of service. It brings out the adventure in your life. I wanted a plain background as I just wanted to focus on myself. I usually wear glasses and I chose to take them off because they act as a barrier between me and what is ahead in my life.

Now is the time to focus on ourselves to make sure we are in the “present” now. All of life worries are not worth it, if you can’t focus on yourself and your well-being. People in the world will always be who they are, so if you want to live YOUR best life, you must take the time to care for yourself.

This is my second time taking the *Breaking Barriers* course and I will continue to come back because of the enjoyment and comradery with other service personnel. Nobody is a stranger in the Armed Forces. In the Army you are considered a soldier for life. As members of the Armed Forces we can all learn something from one another. The stories we can tell and the adventures we have experienced are somethings you don’t hear about in the normal way of life. “Normal Way of Life”—What is that anyway?

This year, the class gave me an opportunity to learn about the one thing we have to carry as a lifeline today, the cellphone. The class provided insight to the many options a cellphone camera can provide when using it for photography. I am a jewelry designer and the course allowed me to improve my photographic skills when capturing the designs of my jewelry without having to use a traditional camera. What a marvelous way to learn something new and have fun, such a concept: getting an education while having fun!

LORETTA FIELDS
US ARMY





JEANIEL IMAGE

★ US NAVY

Motherhood in the Military

A look into motherhood is very different when you're looking at it through the lens of a mother serving in the military. It is not often that the image of America's military is depicted in the way it really should be, open and honest. When I started this class, I did not expect it to turn out the way it did. I found myself becoming frustrated with trying to create scenes and portraits that were pristine and perfect. At the end of the day I was tired from the day's work and still had my roles and responsibilities as a mother and a spouse. The last thing I wanted to do was capture images of our worn and tattered lives as a military family. The unkept room filled with items from our daily routines, small memorabilia left in plain sight to keep us grounded and remind us of what we have been through. Then there is the look of skepticism, or is it a look of surrender? For me it was both: I became skeptical of what my role as a mother should look like. I surrendered to the thought of what America's military should look like. *Breaking Barriers* has forced me to look in on myself as a person, as a mother, as a military spouse, and even as an artist, and not at what society thinks these roles should be: instead looking at them for what they really are, and what those roles mean to me.

Motherhood has been by far the most emotional, challenging, and toughest job I have ever done. To do it while serving in the military has been fraught with heartache, pain, sacrifice, and loss. Capturing how these two lives converge was something I did not think would be reflected in my own self-image. Looking back on this image and reflecting on my experience in the military and my life as a mother I see now that both roles have some mirroring characteristics. Such as, leading your unit down the right path, is like leading and teaching your children to make the right decisions in any circumstance. The irony in my service in the military is the disbelief that I have my own children at home while I still serve. Leaving them behind while I spend my days overseas has been a conversation of shame and revulsion by other moms. Filled with comments such as "I can't believe you left your babies for that long," and followed by questions like;

"your husband is ok, with that?" these comments leave me feeling less than a mother. Although, many of these comments are sent with good intention and concern they still cut like a knife, knowing that my service in the military is by choice not by force. A choice I wholeheartedly decided for myself and for my family. As I hold my daughter close to me, I cherish her, and I am confident in my decision to support her and her siblings in this way. I look at my uniform and feel assured that I have made an impact on the sailors I serve with and the communities we have been to.

I ask that you look at this picture and not shame the mother pictured here. Instead, think of the countless men and women serving in our nation's great military. Take in everything you see; me breast feeding my baby, the uniform, the medications on the nightstand, the look on my face, my husband's dog tags, and everything else in the image. In the military it is expected we are squared away, organized and perfect in everything we do; at home our families are not that picture-perfect image. Reshape the image of America's military; we are one of the most diverse organizations in the country. With all nationalities serving along side each other in some of the hardest of times, mentally, physically, and emotionally. I dare you to see the challenges faced by these military families, the sacrifice involved for each family touched by a single military member. In addition, do not shame dads for taking on mom roles while his spouse is serving, instead support him; these men are stepping up to the plate to support our military. The military has been evolving in amazing ways and still has a long way to go, for our country to continue to be a nation of innovation and change for good. We can continue to move in a positive direction if we change our perspective and become more open minded in the way we give value to these roles in society. Parenting is hard enough as it is; support our moms in the military for their choice to serve, and support their spouses for being single parents while they are gone.

JEANIEL IMAGE
US NAVY





DOUGLAS ERIC JORDAN

★ US ARMY

Hat Rack

Throughout your life, you play many roles or “wear many hats.” I have never really liked taking photographs of myself or having my photo taken. I completed twenty years in the Army and, when it came time for my retirement ceremony, I had almost no photos of myself wearing a uniform. During the *Breaking Barriers* workshop I was tasked with taking a series of self-portraits for various assignments. As an undergraduate student, I was trained as a journalist, but never learned “art” photography. During this assignment, I travel through time acting as a “hat rack” for a series of identities that I have held during my military career and beyond.

Each image is listed with the years that it was part of my hat rack...All of these hats are the actual ones that I have worn as part of my military service or in my life. Of particular interest (to me): I served in Airborne units for most of my career so I wore #2 a beret for most of my time. #6 is the cap that I wore in Afghanistan from 2009-2010 when I worked as an advisor and #7 is a hat my son gave me when he attended West Point.

I have been invited to participate in the *Breaking Barriers* workshop for the last three years but always thought that this is not for me. This year, I received one last email that said, we still have room for you, and I thought that this was a sign that I needed to try something new (old).

Breaking Barriers provided me the opportunity to re-learn some photographic techniques that I had forgotten as well as learn to use some available tips and tricks for using that powerful tool that we all have in our pocket. Additionally, it allowed me to become more comfortable using my mind to see the world

around me, and myself, in ways that I have not done in a long time.

It is extremely nerve wracking to do “art” when you don’t have a background, and then have ten peers and three professional artists critique you. What I gained from this experience is that you can be trusting of others in this type of environment and that that trust will help you grow and learn. Also, they see things differently than you do. They see promise in “happy little mistakes.”

I have studied communication and international relations for over thirty years and never really considered the use of art photography as a way for me to tell my personal story. This workshop encouraged us to look to other artists for ideas and for inspiration—and as an outlet for our thoughts and ideas.

I had forgotten how much I like photography and now I remember....

DOUGLAS ERIC JORDAN

US ARMY, LIEUTENANT COLONEL (RET)





VALERIE LARSON

★ US AIR FORCE

Mirrored Love

My husband and I tend to be ships in the night due to our jobs. I leave him messages of love on his mirror when I do not see him for a couple of days. When the class assignment, elements of concealment, was assigned, I thought this would be a perfect example. If I could leave a ghostly image of myself with the lipstick message, I could show my husband I am always with him.

I found out about the *Breaking Barriers* through my job at the VA. I have always been interested in photography but took the typical sunsets, family or selfie photos. I thought this might be the perfect way to explore ways to break out of my photography box and learn not only creative techniques but technical techniques as well.

I was incredibly surprised to see the class was cellphone photography. However, I soon realized just how challenging using a cellphone to take professional level photos was going to be. I was very timid in my photos at the beginning of the class, not pushing any of the limits. I was certainly uncomfortable sharing them with the class. As the class progressed, I gained confidence in myself, seeing I could indeed capture images that could make people laugh, smile, or wonder how in the world did she get that to work.

I think *Mirrored Love* is an image that makes people pause to look at all the aspects of the photo and maybe find new details each time they look. I had great difficulty

setting the image up. My bathroom had 4 mirrors reflecting into each other. I also had to deal with the shower glass reflecting in the mirrors. Thankfully, I had beautiful afternoon sunlight streaming in to light my photograph, so that was one less worry to deal with. My biggest concern was how to take the photo without getting the cellphone in the image. After about a dozen test photos, I finally arranged the cellphone in the hall where it wouldn't be seen. The objects on my husband's sink truly represent who he is: brush his teeth, shave, a little cologne, and out the door. The most important part of the image is the message I always leave for my husband telling him I love him. I also decided to try a new technique and use a slow shutter speed. I was able to leave a ghostly image of myself in the photograph.

I feel I grew both as a person and a photographer by taking the *Breaking Barriers* workshop. The class made me step out of my comfort zone. Through class assignments, I came to look at ordinary objects in different ways, be they different angles, lights, or colors. The photos I took at the beginning of the class were my typical photos, from a bridge with its reflection, to a silhouette. Typical and boring. By the end of the class, I am using slow shutter speeds and working with reflections. I am working with editing photos to make sure I have the image just the way I want it to look. I have gained confidence in my photography skills. But more importantly, I have gained confidence in myself. I have seen that I can accomplish whatever it is I want. All through a cellphone photography class.

VALERIE LARSON
US AIR FORCE





JOHN LEDUC

★ US ARMY

Mask

The photos are my take on the year 2020 and what the year has become. There are over 330 million people in the United States and over 7.8 billion people in the world, all have been affected by the CoV-2019 virus. COVID-19 has affected the world's economies, closed schools and restaurants, shattered lifestyles, caused deaths and caused severe depression.

But I believe photography can help people, by capturing a person's feelings and thoughts and help release the stress that they may be experiencing. The photograph as 'art' may bring an emotional release through humor, anger, sadness or beauty that is in the eye in the beholder as well as the person that took the photo; and the two don't have to see the same thing.

"Photography is a magical kind of art that allows people to preserve time and moments, and to describe the world the way they see it."

—Sahara Sanders

JOHN LEDUC

US ARMY





JASON D. LIND

★ VETERAN AFFAIRS

Chronicle of a Self-Portrait

Exploring Cultural Identity

I am not a Veteran. I am an anthropologist who conducts social science research and quality improvement projects at the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa, FL. After working with Veterans and their families for the past 11 years, I have come to realize that art and artistic expression is a powerful tool that can be used to heal, facilitate recovery, and provide a medium for self-exploration. This, and a lifetime interest in photography is what brought me to *Breaking Barriers* in a dual role: program evaluator and participant. It has been an honor and a privilege to have worked alongside this group of Veteran participants; to have learned from them and to have heard and seen their stories through photography.

My goal with this set of photographs was to explore the concept of cultural frame switching (first described by W.E.B Du Bois) which addresses the phenomenon of how bicultural individuals can switch between two cultural mindsets or interpretive lenses, in response to cultural or environmental stimuli. Language is a big part of this, as bilinguals can express different personality traits when speaking a different language. I first learned cultural frame switching "skills" during anthropological field work in Latin America and while learning Spanish. I lived in, studied, and integrated into different cultures in Bolivia, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Colombia. Later on, I spent three years living and working in Colombia, doing research and working as a professor at a university. I also spent a lot of time on a small farm, an experience that had a big impact on me. During this whole experience I met my wife and we have since settled here in Tampa. We speak mostly Spanish in the home and we routinely travel back and forth to Colombia to visit. Colombia feels like home to me almost as much as my native Minnesota...two very different cultures that I am somehow able to assimilate and navigate.

The photos here represent the experiences and memories of the time I spent in and around that small farm in Colombia. In addition, they represent the joy of being able to shape-shift between two worlds, to be able to act out and explore a different part of the self. In these photographs I use symbols like the sombrero vueltiao (a typical Colombian hat), a poncho, a mochila (typical woven bag), and a machete to represent these experiences and memories. The use of my medium format Mamiya c220 camera represents my delight in "simple things" such as manual cameras, aspects of rural life, and being in nature. This self-portrait looking through the camera represents a reflection of myself through the lens of two cultures, memory, time and space.

JASON D. LIND
VETERAN AFFAIRS



MAMIYA C220

MAMIYA-SEKOR
No. 652445

MAMIYA-SEKOR
No. 652445

IRIS



MIKKO MAKI

★ US MARINES

Daily Reminder

Written as told to Bethany Maki

I wanted to be a Marine since I was a child, listening to local veterans who volunteered at my Boy Scout camp talk about their adventures overseas and the meaning of serving others. I wanted to be an infantry man like them, a “ground pounder.” I enlisted on my 17th birthday. Because I wanted to go in as soon as possible, I signed up as an open contract, meaning no MOS (military operational specialty) was assigned and I’d be allocated to whatever the need of the Marines was when I went in.

Apparently, the Marines needed a photographer. With a few weeks left in boot camp, our drill instructors sat us down to talk about life in the Marines. Here I learned I would be going to an Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado for training as combat photographer. It was at this base that I fell in love with photography. I learned all about cameras and developing film, and trained on a myriad of military technology to fulfill the job of a combat photographer. I was enjoying the school but I still wanted to be an infantry man. A few weeks before graduation, we were going through a typical military inspection. The inspecting officer, an Air Force general, asked me how I felt about being a combat photographer. I told him that I joined the Marines to be in the infantry, period. The Marine Detachment commander who was in this same inspection heard this and ordered me to report to his office at 0800.

The next morning, the commander asked if I was serious about being in the infantry. I said, “Yes Sir!” He handed me a set of orders and told me that I would be leaving for Camp Pendleton, California the following day, and told me to enjoy my life in the infantry. This closed my chapter as a Marine combat photographer but ignited my lifelong passion for making images. Throughout my 15-year career in the Marines and 20-year career in technology after I “retired,” I always found time with my cameras.

That changed on April 4, 2015. This was the day I was admitted to the hospital with strange neurological symptoms that made the doctors suspect I had a stroke. Eleven days later, they figured out what was wrong. I had contracted HIV and developed AIDS—cerebral toxoplasmosis, a common parasitic infection among people with severely weakened immune systems, was at the root of my neurological symptoms. A few days after that, the doctors also discovered I was losing my eyesight to retinal cytomegalovirus, another opportunistic infection. Five years later, I’ve lost most of my executive function, short term memory and have both sight and hearing loss because of the 17 areas of scar tissue left in my brain from the toxoplasmosis. But I’m alive.

I built a barrier around myself after my diagnosis and cognitive loss. I don’t fit with my old work friends from my days in tech, or at church, or with volunteer groups where everything moves at what I refer to as “normal human speed.” And, because my brain works so slowly now, I can’t manipulate the settings on my professional cameras. I sold them, and thought I was closing the chapter on my love of making images.

But the veteran community has always felt like a safe place to me—we accept each other broken. My wife found the information about *Breaking Barriers* through the Exalted Warrior Foundation. The class, even in the virtual setting forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, lived up to its name. It helped me break the barrier I built around myself, find a new way to love photography using an iPhone, and tell a story with this picture, *A Daily Reminder*, that I can’t verbalize. I am forever grateful to *Breaking Barriers* and hope that this program and the healing it enables grows to serve all of this country’s veterans.

MIKKO MAKI

US MARINES





ALEX MARTINEZ

★ US ARMY

Migraine

Migraine is a self-portrait. I experience migraines; they are part of me now, of my reality and "self." The image captures a moment when I felt a migraine coming on, an unpleasant experience that can last days and is utterly debilitating. I've always loved the look and 'feel' of black and white photography and here it felt more raw, not unlike the suffering of that type of pain.

Although my body fills the frame, I do not look at the camera. Being in front of the lens is uncomfortable. I'm very reserved about myself. I honestly don't like speaking about myself nor do I like to be the subject of my own work... I let whatever I do take center stage, not myself, so self-portraiture was a challenge. A little about me that I am comfortable sharing is that I love to cook. My cuisine is sophisticated, and I make everything from scratch or as from scratch as possible. I enjoy taking snapshots of my dishes to post on Instagram. Prior to this I had never before taken a photography course. I was looking for another creative outlet and took the *Breaking Barriers* workshop to expand my horizons and look at things differently.

ALEX MARTINEZ

US ARMY





MATIAS

★ US MARINES

Untitled practice-based research project

Detail of four channel Installation

I enrolled in the *Breaking Barriers* workshop to support developing my practice toward a more conceptual framework that addresses issues related to my life experiences. Expanding the implications of my art, I have begun making work that involves aspects of memory, military service, and immigration.

With this practice-based research piece, I was interested in making art for installation that explores aspects of self, surveillance, and screens. The ubiquity of media in our lives is absolute. Our fixation on computers is amplified by the advent of smartphones. Social media distracts from the control being exerted over us by corporations that provide this digital distraction, so much so that we ignore the data we provide just by using our cellular devices.

We are constantly surveilled with our likeness recorded as image, sound, movement, engagement, location, altitude, and gesture. Even our vital signs and health metrics are liquidated for profit and marshalled for incremental advances in the name of commerce and national security, not just by commercial institutions but also by foreign governments and (just as problematically) by our own government. This pruning of the individual person to a data point (or thousands, or millions, of them) inspired this installation piece and continues to inform revisions of this work.

Matias is a Chilean American Artist and a Marine Corps Veteran.

MATIAS

US MARINES





NOEMYS MCCONNELL

★ US ARMY

The Fire Within

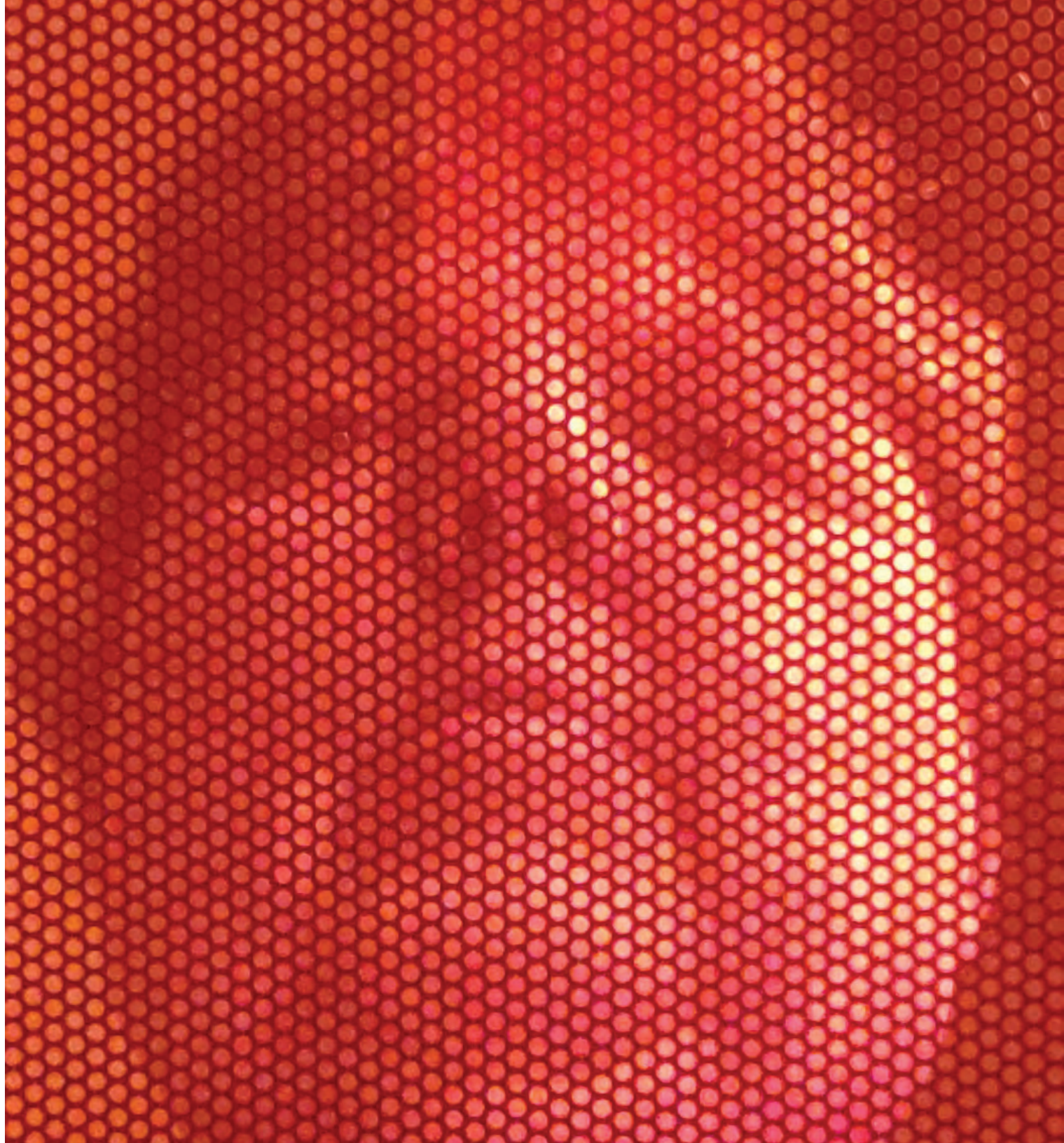
I was cleaning my oven and noticed the interesting pattern in the glass, and my inspiration came from that. I took my image with the oven door open, using a tripod located on the floor with the cell phone facing upward, looking from the outside into the oven door. I then stood over the oven door and took the picture, adding a red filter. Later while looking at the image, I realized the unintended story to my photo.

The oven door pattern symbolized almost a jail like feeling or a struggle to get out, which could easily depict the pain that I suffer. The red color was me looking out at the struggles of today's world... or was it a rosy red that was telling me that everything would be ok? Often, red is thought to be heat, flame, madness, blood, or anger. Red can however mean courage and love. I am still seeking what the red symbolized for me.

I love taking pictures, mostly of travel, and putting them into videos with relevant music and animation. Over the last two years as my medical disability took over my life, I lost focus on my hobby, as movement became an impediment and carrying the camera equipment became impossible. I could no longer climb to unusual places or get into unusual positions to capture the beauty of the moment. I also considered cell phone photos to be inferior in quality. Along came COVID and I was told by a fellow Veteran about *Breaking Barriers* and decided to embark on learning what could be done with cell phones. I learned that there is more to a photo, that it is an art. I became unafraid of selfies as I found that I could find out more about myself through them. As the workshop progressed, I realized that I was having fun, learning so much more and was inspired to wrestle through my

pain issues. I found that there is so much to capture in one's own confines which made the COVID confinement less stressful. It also gave me an outlet from my constant depression, giving me a ray of sunshine. The value of this workshop is significant to Veterans to explore their own creativity using what they already have access to, as well as helping them with self-discovery and healing.

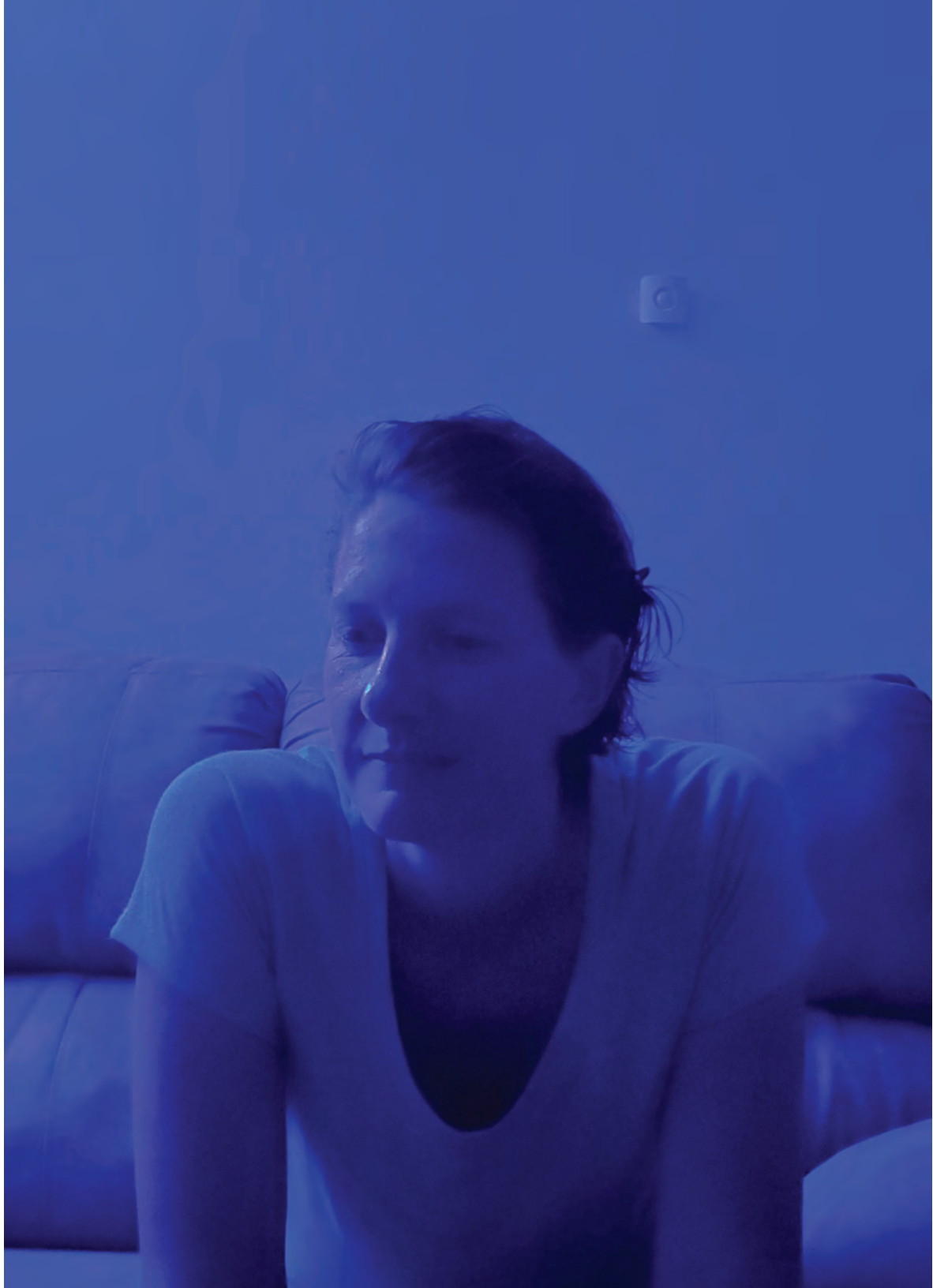
NOEMYS MCCONNELL
US ARMY





**MEGAN
O'CONNELL**

★ US NAVY





ROBERT ORTEGA

★ US MARINES

Untitled

I have done photography before, but never used photography as an art medium. I photographed for work and enjoy taking pictures when I can. However, the workshop centered around self-portraiture. I did not want to make portraits with myself as a subject. Rather I found other ways to fulfill the projects. I took pictures that referenced me and that fit into my everyday life instead of a literal, or out of the way, or contrived self-portrait.

The gym is part of my normal activities. I took this image from my garage gym. Here, the hand prints are a type of self-portrait. They are an indication of my presence and the picture of my unique self without having to be in front of the camera. I was asked about the American flag in the background. It was not staged for the picture. It is not a prop. It is a part of my life and is represented or displayed in several locations.

I learned a lot through this workshop. I personally do not enjoy taking photos of myself, but I learned and now appreciate the challenges that self-portraiture can present, especially before the digital age. I made a couple of different photos in the gym one day. The pictures that I was physically present in took quite a bit of effort to get the right action, framing, lighting, exposure, etc. for the shot. I had to go back and forth to view the picture, adjust, and retake the photo. What I thought would be snapping a few pictures during my workout added over an hour just to get the right image. I was reminded of several things I had learned before and the workshop gave me the opportunity to exercise those skills and principles. The *Breaking Barriers* workshop was an opportunity to recall from the past and still discover new things.

ROBERT ORTEGA

US MARINES





ADAINA PLAZA

★ US AIR FORCE

No Filter

Photography has become a vital part of everyday life. Many make money from their photos, others use photography as a means of staying connected and sharing with those closest to them, while others use it to relay information. But one thing is for sure, photos are essential to mankind. What would history look like without photography? If it wasn't for photography, we would not have history, we would not know what Abraham Lincoln looked like or more importantly our ancestors. The pictures we take now will be the memories for our grandkids and their kids once we are gone. It allows us to not be forgotten. Photography is such an underappreciated art. Photographers risk their lives to get pictures that we view today, from those who took pictures of Nazis and death camps to those who took pictures as the Twin Towers fell. If these pictures didn't exist there could be speculation whether it happened or not, but the proof is in the picture.

I recently learned about "Visual Storytellers." We have all heard the saying "Pictures are worth a thousand words" right? Well, our pictures tell a story. That picture of you and your best friend sporting a painfully massive smile that stretches the football field, begs the question—what were they smiling about? Did something funny or exciting just happen? Are they posing for a photoshoot? Are they telling each other jokes? Although we may never know, it was an intimate happy moment between two people that they will forever be reminded of when they look at that photo.

Pictures can tell a lot about someone whether they are masking or not. My images show that I didn't worry about taking the perfect picture when I traveled. It's true, I would snap a picture so I could say I was there and look back, but I wouldn't spend a lot of time finding the right angle, position, lighting, pose, etc. But I see the value in quality pictures. I want beautiful amazing pictures, but I also don't want it to consume my travels.

Over the course of this class, the most important thing I took away from the workshop is appreciation. I learned to appreciate the pictures I took. I learned to put a little more effort into them and use my individualism and personality as the inspiration behind my pictures. These pictures will be my legacy when I am gone not my money nor my things but "me."

Photography is a form of expression and self-identity. I am trying to convey that my photograph and myself are unedited with filters or makeup application. I feel like today's society believes that beauty standards require "when hair is done, nails did" and a full face of makeup applied, for someone to be beautiful. I think they got it all wrong. When one can take all that stuff off and look at one's self and be happy with what they see...that's a beauty!!!

Sometimes a photograph is beautiful thanks to the position and what the camera saw. We often live life from the sole perspective of our eyes; a 6'7 man will always see from the top looking down or a baby will always be looking up. I just thought about the different perspectives viewed from the camera and "wow this is how small animals and bugs see the world;" lol, what a beautiful view.

ADAINA PLAZA

US AIR FORCE





PAT RANDALL

★ US ARMY

Weight On My Shoulders

Looking for props around the house led me upstairs to my Coca-Cola collection. I thought there must be objects that I could transform in an unusual or interesting way to create humor or silliness for the viewer. I did not expect the result. The first thing that came to mind after viewing the resulting photo was “wow, look at all that weight on my head, pulling down on my ears.” The serious look was actually from just holding my breath trying to balance everything, but it turned into a reflection of what actually brought me to the *Breaking Barriers* photography workshop.

Taking pictures is something that I like to do for fun and life has not been much fun lately. Battling forces of pain, depression, anxiety, and anger presents huge challenges during ordinary times, but current world events, with all the obstacles of a pandemic, make it more difficult than usual to find outlets for relief. A fellow Veteran spoke of the workshop in one of the many programs, provided by our Tampa Veterans Administration staff, that I participate in as part of my overall mental and physical health treatment I began the workshop thinking “how am I ever going to find any interesting self-portraits,” and ended with the problem of having too many to choose from each week. I tried to take this opportunity to be mischievous and ambiguous about the shots and explore both my serious and silly sides. I had fun with the concealment and abstraction assignments, discovering that what I intended by a shot can be interpreted in many ways by other viewers.

On this day I just happened to have on a red shirt when I headed upstairs on my adventure. When I viewed the photo, I thought experimenting with filters would be interesting with this shot. I found a filter that transformed the gray walls to more of a Coca-Cola green. As I searched, I randomly grabbed

a tablecloth to set on my head with curtain tie-backs to hang from my ears. What started out as just a random silly act, turned into a reflection of my life's struggles. The experience has sparked a curiosity to explore creative activities.

PAT RANDALL
US ARMY





HEATHER RIVERA

★ US AIR FORCE

Heritage

I can remember as a little girl, my mom and I, wearing babushkas, would light the shabbat candles. A babushka is a scarf that is tied under the chin and typically worn by Polish and Russian women and comes from a conservative and orthodox Jewish background. The hair is considered sacred and is one's crown and glory. Covering of the head in Judaism is because only the married spouse shall see the wife's hair. My mother's heritage and culture is from what is now the Ukraine. When she and my grandmother were young, Ukraine was still part of Russia.

Originally, I picked the two articles (flag fan and babushka) because of the color contrast and the definition of embellishments against each other. The Puerto Rican flag fan represents my husband and his heritage, culture, and race. I chose the babushka and Puerto Rican flag fan to represent our family as a whole and how we both respect each other's upbringing and culture. The Puerto Rican fan represents how much respect I have for my husband and his heritage. His family came from Spain and settled on the island. The cloth is a belly dance scarf which is a tradition of the Middle East. After WWII many Jewish individuals settled in Israel which became a country shortly after the end of the war. In a way that is my culture as well. Both stories show how far both families went to escape injustice and find a new path without persecution or bias towards their race or culture. I also made this image because of the current cultural climate. *Heritage* shows that two people from completely different areas of the world can come together as one in unity and still maintain the traditions and culture of the past. I stare directly at the viewer. I want them to see me as a female, a strong female, who cherishes not only my background and history, but also my husband's as well.

The fan has gorgeous detail, but it also shows a feminine side of me. I was in the military for fifteen years and I wore a uniform that looked just like the men's uniform. The only difference was that women could have longer hair. For professional reasons, the hair had to be above our collars, but I also believe that our hair had to be up to avoid showing a feminine side. Fingernails could not be painted with colors, they had to be neutral. Our makeup and hair color had to be neutral. Femininity is not something that the military looks highly upon.

I have loved working with black and white photography since I was in high school and have always found that it shows all imperfection and beauty at the same time. Black and white photography is not easy to accomplish because the camera flash tends to focus on the shiny objects and not the actual portrait.

I took the *Breaking Barriers* workshop because I wanted to learn more about the camera and revisit some long-lost skills. When I learned the workshop was going to be about portraiture, I thought it would be fun to learn a new aspect of myself. *Breaking Barriers* was suggested to me because I express a lot of myself through arts in different mediums and the workshop gave me a reason to put the camera back into my hand and learn new things about the camera and myself that I haven't seen or done in years.

HEATHER RIVERA

US AIR FORCE





RAEANNE SWANSON

★ US AIR FORCE

Time in the Pink Pool Floatie

I have always enjoyed taking photographs, and over the years I have shot and printed hundreds of photos of local and vacation scenery, my many dogs, and my two children. I have always strived to find creative ways to take these photos, so when I saw the advertisement for the *Breaking Barriers* photography workshop, I applied in hopes that I could connect with other Veterans who were interested in photography. I also wanted to learn new strategies and methods for not only taking photos but editing them to produce even better photos.

During this year's *Breaking Barriers* workshop, I was a little nervous at first because the theme was "self-portraits" and I have always been more comfortable behind, versus in front of, the camera.

The photograph, *Time in the Pink Pool Floatie*, while a self-portrait, reveals more of a feeling than an image of me. This idea came about because I was trying to think of a way to make a self-portrait without actually "being recognizable" in the portrait, yet I wanted this photograph to convey something about me that others might recognize or feel when looking at this picture.

I have always loved the water and am so grateful to have a pool in my backyard, because it is an oasis on any given day. It is a place filled with so many wonderful memories: my children learning to swim, my dogs jumping in and having swim races, the many family gatherings, and the dozens of pool parties with friends. My time in the pink pool floatie brings back all of these memories, it refreshes my body and my spirit,

and it helps me to reflect on the fact that life, while difficult at times, always has precious memories that we have yet to make.

RAEANNE SWANSON
US AIR FORCE





MICHAEL WEBB

★ US AIR FORCE

Painted Patriotism

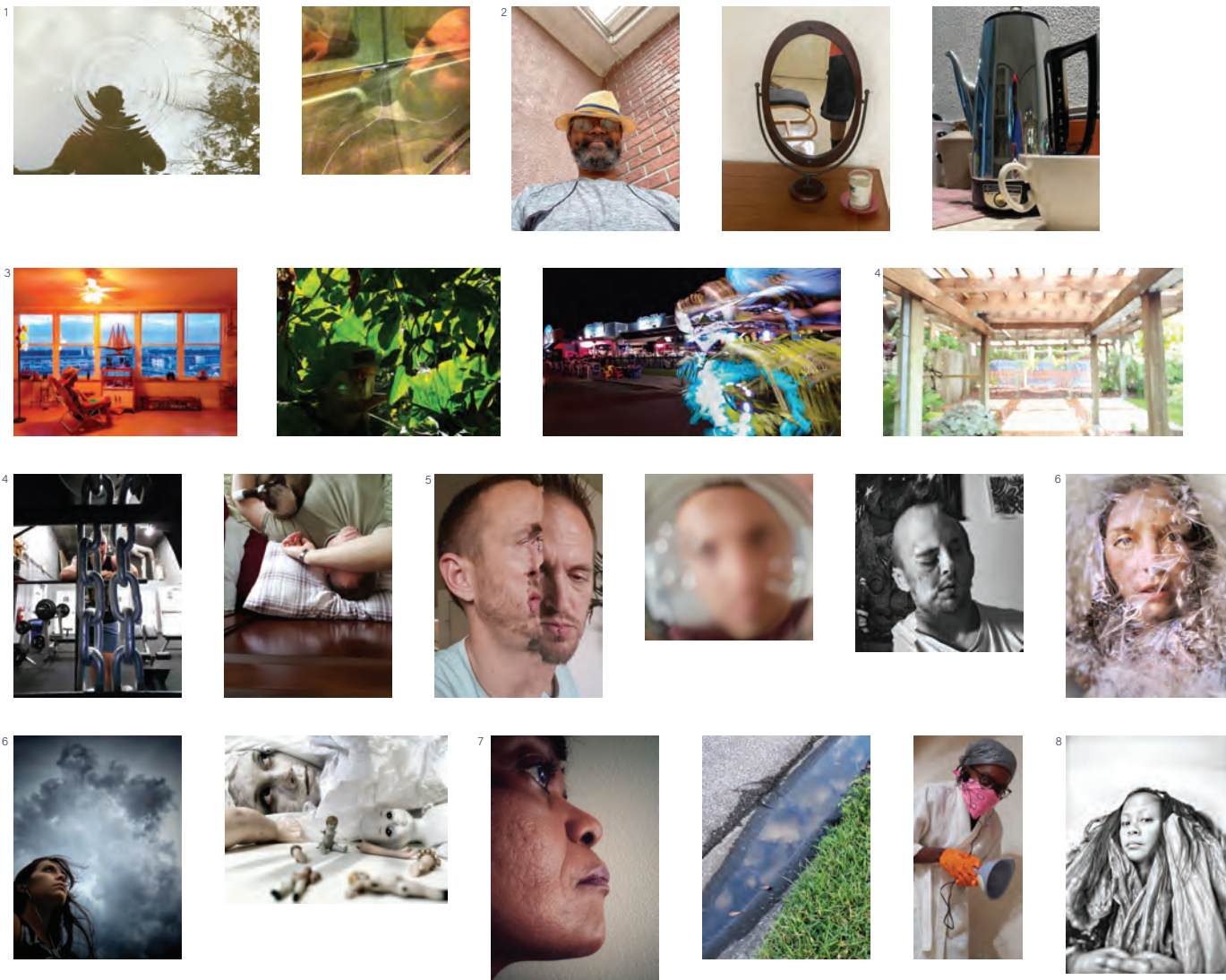
A social war rages in the United States. This war is being fought primarily on social media using quick witted tweets, memes and hashtags, but it is not without its casualties. Our democracy is experiencing an incredibly vulnerable moment characterized by divisions and polarizations—the haves vs the have nots, rural vs urban, conservative vs liberal, us vs them, democrat vs republican, “American” vs immigrant. Citizens are fighting fellow citizens, states against the federal government. It seems chaos exists at every turn. One of the war’s casualties—the American flag. Traditionally, the flag represents “We the people” in this imperfect union. It’s a symbol that belongs to all U.S. citizens! The flag is both apolitical and political at the same time. The flag does not represent a single political party but moreover the democratic ideals that allow the U.S. to have free elections and open discourse. During the birth of our nation as the founding fathers drafted the constitution, Federalists and Anti-Federalists wrote a series of articles arguing for different versions of America, yet they worked together to advance the new nation. Neither side called the other “Un-American.” The American flag symbolizes a dialogue among people with diverse ideas, a dialogue that must return to preserve our imperfect union.

In the photograph only the colors of the flag are bright and vibrant. The color of my skin, the language I speak, my political affiliation, or the religion I choose to follow are muted and are not determinate to the depths of my patriotism!

MICHAEL WEBB

US AIR FORCE





1. Michael Ball
Lake Ann, 2020
On The Red Line, 2020

2. TC Bryant
Dad's Hat, 2020
Untitled, 2020
Untitled, 2020

3. Larry Busby
Marina Blues, 2020
Another Day in Paradise, 2020
One too Many and Then Some, 2020

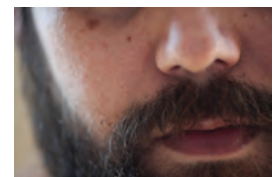
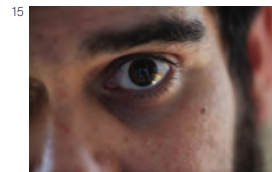
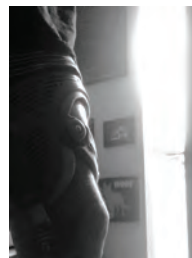
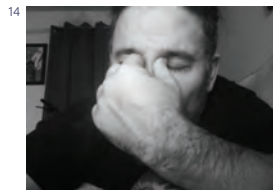
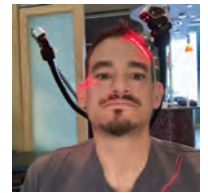
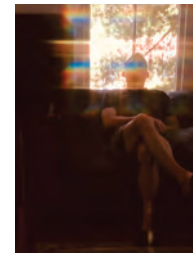
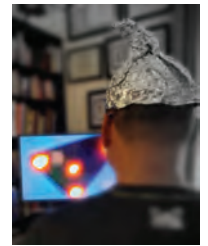
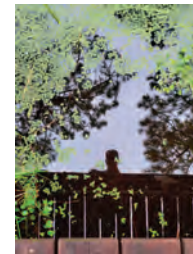
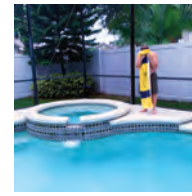
4. David Canaday
Ghost Walk, 2020
Forging Strong Links, 2020
Cat Nap, 2020

5. Michael Congdon
Fragmented, 2020
In The Bubble, 2020
Stripped Away, 2020

6. Brandie Dziegiel
Still Life, 2020
Let me get There, 2020
Pitseleh, 2020

7. Loretta Fields
The year 2020, 2020
The Sky's the Limit, 2020
Let's Get Serious, 2020

8. Jeaniel Image
Mother of all Plastics, 2020
Motherhood in the Military, 2020
Digital Selfie, Personal Data, 2020



9. Douglas Eric Jordan
Hat Rack, 2020
Corona Reflection Seal Beach, 2020
Corona Reflection Netflix, 2020

10. Valerie Larson
Coffee Anyone?, 2020
Mirrored Love, 2020
Paint Dinner, 2020

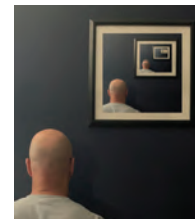
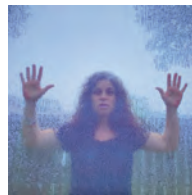
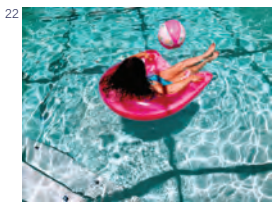
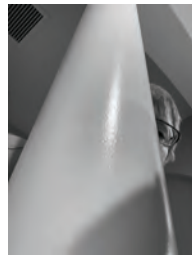
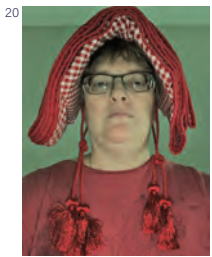
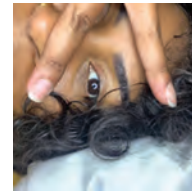
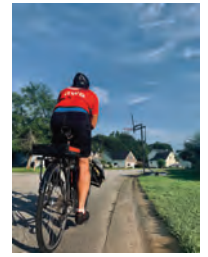
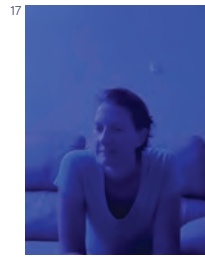
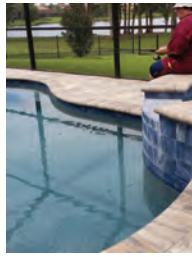
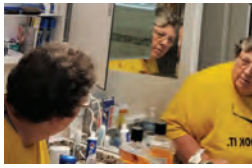
11. John Leduc
Mask, 2020
Reflections, 2020
2020, 2020

12. Jason D. Lind
Chronicle of a Self-Portrait, 2020
Searching for Macondo, 2020
The Labyrinth of Memory, 2020

13. Mikko Maki
Daily Reminder, 2020
TV, 2020
Neurology, 2020

14. Alex Martinez
Migraine, 2020
Brace, 2020

15. Matias
Untitled practice-based research project, 2020



16. Noemys McConnell
The Fire Within, 2020
Reflections, 2020
Finding Alternatives, 2020

17. Megan O'Connell
Untitled, 2020
Untitled, 2020

18. Robert Ortega
Untitled, 2020
Untitled, 2020
Untitled, 2020

19. Adaina Plaza
No Filter, 2020
Who Knows?, 2020
Slant, 2020

20. Pat Randall
Weight On My Shoulders, 2020
Concealment, 2020
Eye See You, 2020

21. Heather Rivera
Heritage, 2020
Face of Reliance, 2020

21. Heather Rivera
Faces of Life, 2020

22. RaeAnne Swanson
Time in the Pink Pool Floatie, 2020
On the Fringe, 2020
Unclear, 2020

23. Michael Webb
Painted Patriotism, 2020
Dimensions, 2020
Darkness Within, 2020

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