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# Leedy-Voulikos art exhibition brings home the power of war

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Special to The Star

Witness, Perspectives on War” at the Leedy-Voulikos Art Center is a startling exhibition filled with intense subject matter.

Gallery director Holly Swangstu spent two years planning this show, and her choice of works by 10 artists of varying ages has a surprising lyricism given the subject matter. Her goal, she said, was to create an exhibit that encompassed both “a younger person’s media-driven perspective and older artists’ close emotional ties on the conflicts of history.”

The centerpiece is Jim Leedy’s staggering 13-foot-high by 50-foot-long sculpture, “The Earth Lies Screaming.” In 1999, Grand Arts provided Leedy with the funding to create this piece, which is being shown in Kansas City for the first time since then.

Composed of bones, skulls and limbs made from foam, darkened to give the appearance of disintegration, the piece is a sobering reminder of wars’ atrocities that seems to follow you from room to room. The work was conceived to exorcise the demons the artist experienced during the Korean War, and its scale and subject are devastating.

John Thein’s three colossal oil paintings, “Wounded Knee/Earth and Sky” (2008), depict the white man’s inhumanity to American Indian culture. The misaligned canvases seem to jump and shake the eye.

Massive acrylic and mixed-media paintings from Jim Sajovic refer to the first Gulf war. There are tacit allusions to Dante’s “Inferno,” as well as to some of the contradictions of our current presence in Iraq — all in the name of “Democraszy” as Sajovic references in one of the pieces.

Misha Kligman’s installation, “Inescapable” (2009), consists of drawings and small sculptures that give strong voice to the immigrant experience, history’s sidebar to conflict.

A photography series depicting child soldiers in Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Cambodia, shot from 1977 to 2000 by Denis Reichle, unmask an unspoken brutality. With their faces twisted in grotesque incomprehension, the terrified subjects are acutely aware that the guns they hold are not toys.

Other artists round out the exhibition with unique takes on war’s dominance. In Skyler Bieberly’s “Untitled” (2008-09), a large carcass dominates the canvas with bodies stacked at one end. Matteo Potter’s oil-painted and computer-generated collages are figurative and literal discussions of the

war on resources. Justin Bell's "Mug Shot" (2009), a skull series in pastel conceived as an exercise, expresses both an internal conflict and a comment on the human condition.

Two limited edition prints from nationally recognized graffiti artist Gear address the trauma of death on families and record an actual number of American casualties in all wars combined to date.

Tim Guthrie's terrifying graphite and Conté drawings on paper, "Extraordinary Rendition" (2009), feature subjects whose senses have been blocked and rendered deaf, dumb or blind.

"The phrase in the title," Guthrie says, "is used to describe the practice of secretly capturing suspected criminals or terrorists without the knowledge of anyone else, including the governments of the countries in which individuals reside."

The Big Brother effect continues as the gallery is under surveillance by cameras attached to each frame, yielding footage that can be viewed in another gallery.

Considered as a whole, this exhibition shows us that views of war may change, but the landscape remains the same.

### **the show**

"Witness, Perspectives on War" continues at the Leedy-Voulikos Art Center, 2012 Baltimore Ave., through Feb. 5. The gallery is closed for the holidays through Jan. 6. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and by appointment. For more information, call 816-474-1919, or visit [www.leedy-voulikos.com](http://www.leedy-voulikos.com).

### **first friday moves**

With New Year's Day falling on a First Friday, many galleries have moved their openings to Jan. 8. See next week's Preview section for a list of those openings.