

Related Events:

Exhibitions Reception	Film Screening: <i>A War</i>	<i>War Stories</i> Storytelling Session	Artist Talk: Mary King
Sunday, October 30 3:00 - 5:00 pm	Thursday, November 3 5:30 - 7:00 pm	Sunday, November 20 2:00 - 4:00 pm	Sunday, January 15 2:00 - 4:00 pm
Celebrate the opening of <i>War Stories</i> with Mary King.	The Art Center will screen the Danish film, <i>A War</i> (2015) selected by artist Mary King, who will introduce the film.	Veterans and an Iraqi refugee will report their war experiences.	Mary King will talk about her process of collecting narratives and creating her stylized compositions to fit the stories.

About the artist:
Mary King (1942, Sturgis, MI) is an artist based in Chicago, IL and Hamburg, Germany. King received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University Of Chicago and a Master of Arts from Western Michigan University. Her exhibitions include solo shows at Woman Made Gallery (Chicago), Denise Bibro Fine Art Gallery (New York), and group shows at the Colfax Cultural Center (IN) and the Butler Art Institute of American Art (OH). In addition to the *War Stories* series, she is working on *People You Know*, which portrays personal dramatic interactions and on *Beautiful Industry*, which celebrates industry that is still in operation in the Chicago and Detroit areas.

The artworks on view are available for purchase through Hyde Park Art Center. If interested, contact exhibitions@hydeparkart.org.

Hyde Park **ARTCENTER**

5020 South Cornell Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60615 773.324.5520 www.hydeparkart.org. Hyde Park Art Center is a unique resource that advances contemporary visual art in Chicago by connecting artists and communities in unexpected ways. The Art Center is funded in part by the: Alphawood Foundation; Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts; a City Arts III grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events; Field Foundation of Illinois; Harpo Foundation; Harper Court Arts Council; Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; The Irving Harris Foundation; The Joyce Foundation; Leo S. Guthman Fund; Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; Polk Bros. Foundation; Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust; and the generosity of people like you.

Mary King:
War Stories

Kanter McCormick Gallery
October 30, 2016 - January 22, 2017



We Couldn't Control Our Borders, 2015, watercolor, acrylic, ink and collage on paper, 14 1/2 x 21 inches.

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The exhibition *War Stories* features a recent series of works on paper that addresses the human experience of war as told to and interpreted by artist, Mary King. Spanning World War I to the present day wars in the Middle East, King transforms personal wartime memories of veterans and persons connected to them, civilians, and refugees into emotionally intense but touching paintings, drawings, and collages. King sat down with Allison Peters Quinn, Director of Exhibition & Residency Programs, to discuss the work.

APQ: *Please talk about what made you start the War Stories series. How long have you been working on it? What compelled you to start it?*

MK: I started the series in 2008. I received an artist residency in Nebraska City at the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts. To be granted a residency, you have to have a project. I decided I would talk to people older than I am – before they’re gone – and learn something. Then I thought well, that’s too broad, so I decided to ask old people questions about war. The directors of the residency helped me. They called an assisted living facility and asked, “Is anybody interested in this?” A 93-year-old woman named Dorothy Fritz immediately called back. She was intent on telling her story about how her husband was killed in the war. Next, Dorothy recruited others to tell their stories.

One of the stories was told by twins in their late 90s. It was about their brother who was conscripted into World War I. Luckily, he got influenza, and the war ended before he got there. Most of what the old people reported, however, was about World War II.

After hearing the WWII stories, I sought a great contrast and focused on the Iraq War. I talked to Iraq veterans and found the first participant on the internet. He is a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War. He told me about other people and it led to meeting more and more people. Eventually, my whole project expanded to include refugees. I contacted the Iraqi Mutual Aid Society in Chicago and met Iraqi refugees whom I interviewed. Now I spend a lot of time in Hamburg, Germany where I meet refugees in a free German language program at the public library. I meet refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and various African countries. And that’s how this this project evolved.

APQ: *You’re talking about a very delicate narrative. Extracting often traumatic stories from people is a very difficult thing to do. How come you’re able to do it so well and gain such private content from people you’ve just met?*

MK: I have a talent of being very curious and asking personal questions one is not supposed to ask, and people answer me because I’m not judgmental. I have a sense of innocence, so people trust me. The people – especially the Iraq veterans – are nervous, and the refugees also. I show them pictures of my work and say it will reveal emotional content, but my work is not photorealistic. It won’t identify exactly who you are so you’re not going to get into any trouble.

APQ: *How do you understand your position as an artist in this situation and how are you able to translate their trauma and memory into an aesthetic object?*

MK: When I interview people I do not tape-record them because that generates way too much information. I write what they say in a combination of longhand and Gregg

shorthand. If they say something that is really striking, I ask them more questions about that one little issue. In my work I don’t try to tell the whole story. I’ll make a vignette, an emotional focus, that reveals that one little thing which sometimes tells more than telling everything. Additionally, I feel a responsibility to be accurate with things as well as with feelings. For example, the gun in “He Did It For Them” is a Browning Automatic Rifle used in WWII and the pattern in “The Bombing Of Baghdad” is based on a metal grate from Iraq. Everything must be accurate to insure the believability of the pictures.

APQ: *There are various styles presented in the works – some are more figurative, gestural, and naive, like the WWII works, and have a style reminiscent of outsider artist Lee Godie as in “He Wanted To Keep Them Safe.” Some are more contemporary even layering Yupo, a plastic paper, over paper as in “I Had To Pay Ransom.” What is the purpose or meaning of these styles in this body of work?*



He Wanted To Keep Them Safe, 2008, watercolor, ebony pencil, and liquid acrylic on .paper, 15 x 12 inches.

MK: The earlier work depicting WWI and II with simple bold lines reflects my experiences with contour drawing from a live model as well as my early influence from working in “color” books in the 1940s. The style fits with a simpler era and with the stories that the old people told which have been told so many times they’ve become simplified. The recent work — especially the refugee pictures— is more complicated because of the internet informing us of so many wars in so many countries. In this work, there might be an ISIS fighter in Iraq and there might be somebody controlling a drone from a desert in the US and it’s all together in one picture because that’s how our experience is now. We have so much at once.

APQ: *You’ve made a point to say that you are not an activist, yet I feel that when I look at your work, it’s not celebrating the outcome of a war or addressing any cultural or economic advancement achieved through conflict. Why do you not want to be called an activist?*

MK: In this art project, I thought my job was to reflect what people said. People said some things I don’t agree with and some things I agree with, but people trusted me, so it would be grossly unfair to take their trust and use it for some kind of campaign. I tried to reflect what they thought as honestly as possible. Some viewers see the work as an anti-war project but that is not my aim. My aim is to get viewers to be more aware, especially citizens in the US. We’re so busy buying things and scrolling through our smartphones and not reflecting. I think we need to take a look at what the US is doing, how and where we’re involved, what’s happening to people, what’s happening to veterans, their relatives. What about refugees? So I’m hoping viewers, through this project, might become a little bit more aware.