

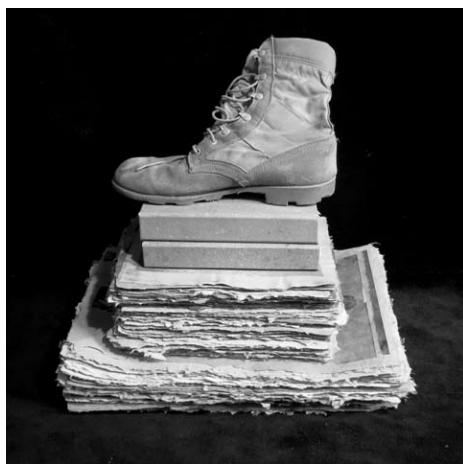
Combat Paper, Fried Books, and Performance Art

Drew Matott, scholarship winner and December speaker, insists book art can be political

Robert McCamant

"The greatest challenge today is not the Iraq war, religious zealotry, global climate change, or believe it or not, our current president. No, the greatest threat is a cynical, disenfranchised public that is afraid to speak.... We must not forget that our voices exist free of the economic system."
— Presentation on "Pulp Politics" by Drew Matott at Friends of Dard Hunter Convention at the Carnegie Institute, Washington, DC, 2007

Books and other paper objects have been important in political history ever since the invention of moveable type made possible the production of large numbers of polemical pieces for reasonable cost. But politics has figured much less prominently in the book arts, those rarefied productions

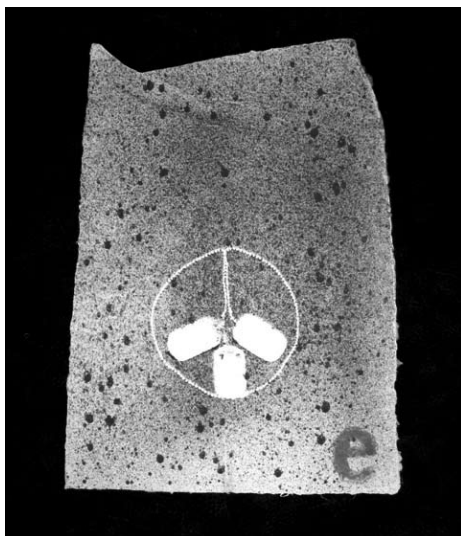


Paper Stack, by Drew Cameron, from the Combat Paper project

known as "artist books" (and still less frequently in their cousins, "fine press" books).

Drew Matott, who was a 2007-8 Caxton Club scholarship winner, and who will talk at the luncheon meeting on December 5, is intent on changing that.

The project he has been working on (in collaboration with Drew Cameron – who will also speak – and with Iraq Veterans Against the War) that has gained the most publicity is "Combat Paper." Let me quote from its own statement of purpose: "Through papermaking workshops veterans use their uniforms worn in combat to create cathartic works of art. The uniforms are cut



Peace Tags, by Eli Wright, from the Combat Paper project

up, beat and formed into sheets of paper. Veterans use the transformative process of papermaking to reclaim their uniform as art and begin to embrace their experiences as a soldier in war."

In case anyone mistakes their intentions, they say "Combat Paper is made in honor of all men and women involved in War. It is created as a means of dealing with the experiences; it offers hope and support to those who are currently involved in combat, in offering that when they return home there is a vehicle for them to express their experi-

Drew Matott batter-dips a book prior to deep frying it



ences and reclaim their lives." The project includes workshops at many locations around the country, and a core group of veterans in Vermont who have created works which are for sale at Booklyn, in New York.

Another project, "Deep Fried Books," could be construed as somewhat more negative. It is "a commentary on America's obsession with an unhealthy lifestyle, unstable foreign policy and blatant disregard for intellectualism." And they're not deep frying just any books. "The deep fried books range in topic from American foreign policy, American dietary recommendations and science encyclopedia." Because this is done publicly, on the street, the process becomes as important as the object created.

Two other such performance/paper art events Drew has organized were "People's Portraits of Jesus" and "People's Portraits of Bush," both done on the street in Chicago.

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Broadside prints from Combat Paper Portfolio IV, a collaborative effort

