

# BAMblog

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2017

## Uniforms Transform into Paper

*This week, My Lai—Jonathan Berger and Kronos Quartet's fevered character study featuring tenor Rinde Eckert and Vân Anh Võ—comes to the BAM Harvey Theater from Wed, Sep 27—Sun, Sep 30. Reflecting on a decisive moment when breaking rank in the name of human decency forever changed the public perception of a war, the piece interrogates the ethics of disobedience in the face of atrocity. During the development of My Lai, the show's creators worked with artist, veteran, and creator of Combat Paper Drew Cameron to generate new visual work inspired by the performance. Below, Cameron describes his process—and what first inspired this transformative creative practice.*



Drew Cameron in Iraq, 2003

By Drew Cameron

I am a veteran of the war in Iraq. I entered the military not because of effective advertisements or hero films, not even college money or idealized patriotism. No, I feel that I entered the military because our society needs soldiers and has always found ways to force or entice us into service. I ran guns in the war, I occupied and criminalized strangers and wondered in the summer of 2003 if the people in Iraq would be better off after all of our invasions. Returning from the war I found other veterans and artists and began to make paper from our old uniforms.

Combat Paper is a process wherein people—military and not—come together for the purpose of transforming military uniforms into handmade paper. We have been doing this work now for a decade and through our collective efforts there are still many more uniforms than there are papermaking workshop events. Combat Paper events are inter-generational, often with our Vietnam veteran friends and mentors opening up their insights for us to learn what life after war might become. Through these exchanges I have listened to enough war stories to know that, in spite of technology or ecology, war always seems to be the same terrifying failure of society's elders towards its youth. Our youth is our greatest asset and we should care for them accordingly.

I believe that 50 years is a necessary span of time to reflect on the devastation of our previous wars, certainly while we are in the midst of several. We are the ones on watch when it occurs. What

then of ***My Lai*** and Hugh Thompson's story? As stories are told, they become ours if we are willing to listen. They are given to us and collectively we give the story more authenticity and voice. Hugh made the choice of a true warrior. He refused to bend to massive pressures and chose the lonely and terrifying path of action. To divert from the common allowable, and understandable, silence that most docile and complicit war fighters and citizens choose shines that honest light onto our deepest secrets. We are a war-making society that supports invading, occupying, and violently attacking sovereign nations. We recruit our youth into service of these efforts. In these times of great injustice and violence that persist, Hugh Thompson's story asks of us not: What would you have done? I believe the legacy of Hugh Thompson and the My Lai story requires us to ask: What are you going to do?

*My Lai runs Sep 27—30 at the BAM Harvey Theater, and **great tickets are still available**.*

Drew Cameron *is based in San Francisco. Learn more about his work at [www.combatpaper.org](http://www.combatpaper.org).*



*My Lai*, pulp print on Combat Paper, 2016

**Chris** at 10:46 AM

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