

E | LIFE & ARTS

Sunday, June 28, 2015

THE WEEK IN ARTS

SATURDAY

"CALL TO DUTY": at Dayton Art Institute, 456 Belmonte Park, N., Dayton. Exhibition will showcase more than 70 original posters from World War I and World War II. These posters by famous artists such as Norman Rockwell, James Montgomery Flagg and Howard Chandler Christy tell the story of the human efforts during these wars. The exhibition is on view during regular museum hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Extended hours on Thursdays until 8 p.m.

Dayton Art Institute's 'Tears of Stone' exhibit focuses on WWI

Area photographer touched by memorials, cemeteries.

By Meredith Moss
Staff Writer

It all began when Cincinnati photographer Jane Alden Stevens was on a trip to Europe. "I was in France with family and we went to lunch and fin-

ished early," she recalls. "We were in a tiny little village and I went out to wait for the others. In the village square was a small four-sided monument. I've always been interested in monuments."

She said the first side, dated 1914, had many names on it. There were also many names on the 1915-16 sides but not

Tears continued on E2



A trip to France inspired photographer Jane Alden Stevens. This is titled "Shell Hole Near Verdun, France." CONTRIBUTED BY JANE ALDEN STEVENS

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LEFT: "Cheveaux-de-Frise, Butte de Vauquois, France," 2003. RIGHT: "Municipal War Memorial, Ypres, Belgium," 2001. JANE ALDEN STEVENS



Tears

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many for 1917. And there were very few on the final side, 1918.

Why would that be, Stevens asked herself. Then she realized that by 1918 all of the men in the village were already gone and had died in the war. There were no more men to send.

"It got me thinking that if this is such a tiny village, what must the impact have been in France and in the Western front countries?" she wondered. "I was already aware that World War I had high casualty rates, but I wondered if anybody still remembered these people and thinks about them? Does anyone still care about this war and these people who lived so long ago? I wanted to find out."

Stevens' curiosity led her to travel abroad a number of times over a period of two years. She shot 200 rolls of film for the project. You'll see the results at the Dayton Art Institute's current exhibit, "Tears of Stone: World War I Remembered," on display at the museum until Oct. 4.

"People still care," con-

cluded Stevens. "The memory of World War I is very strong."

More about Stevens

Stevens, who has always been interested in history and psychology, is the daughter of a photographer and said she has always enjoyed working on projects that examine "who we are as people, how we interact with each other and the world around us."

She lived in Germany for a number of years after college, teaching English as a second language and working as a tour guide. "At the same time, I was pursuing photography on my own," she said. "It developed into such an obsession that eventually I returned to the States to attend graduate school in photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology, in Rochester, New York."

When she was offered a position in the Fine Arts Department at the University of Cincinnati, she began teaching courses in photography, film and professional business practices for fine artists.

"Photography is a language that allows me to communicate with others in ways not available to



Photographer Jane Alden Stevens

me by any other means," Steven said. "I am able to translate my thoughts, feelings, and opinions into photographs that express things that I simply can't say in any other way."

On display

"Tears of Stone" is made up of touching photographs of battlefields, cemeteries, memorials and mementos. The images were taken in England, France, Belgium and Germany with a lens-based camera with panoramic view. All were shot with film, then scanned and printed digitally. Stevens said she also used a pin hole panoramic camera so that she could get extremely close to the ob-

jects she was photographing.

"Monuments are an indicator of history and our past," Steven said. "They honor individuals or events, or groups of people, and that tells us something about ourselves."

She found cemeteries everywhere, including in the middle of fields. In one picture, you'll see laundry flapping in the wind between two houses — a cemetery between them. You'll see the evidence of war that remains — trenches, a shell hole. One of the most tragic photographs is a close shot of an epitaph at the Brookwood Military Cemetery in England. It reads: "SADLY DISFIGURED, TWAS FOR THE BEST, DAD."

People often ask Stevens why she chose to focus on World War I rather than World War II.

"My answer is that I see the event of World War I as a paradigm shift in the history of Western civilization," she said. "It changed everything — the way the governments were led, the way countries did business with each other, it changed societies completely. Nothing was the same after the First World War and

it sewed seeds for the second. Without the first world war, the second wouldn't have happened the way it did. It defined way 20th century was going to go."

Stevens said almost without exception, visitors of all ages have been moved by the exhibit — whether they are schoolchildren, veterans or older people. Many have commented that seeing the show makes them reflect on the nature and consequences of warfare and what it does to the people left behind.

Visitor feedback

Stevens said she was stunned when she discovered guest books in many of the cemeteries.

"People share their thoughts and can make comments, and they are incredibly moving," she said. "So many of the people who signed the books were people who didn't know a lot about the war. They had just seen a cemetery and decided to stop. Then they began to realize something about this event called the Great War."

Based on what she was reading in the guest books, Stevens realized the visits to memorials

were thought-provoking experiences and that many traveled long distances to honor family member they knew fell in the war.

"One visitor had come all the way from Australia to visit the grave of a great-great-uncle," she said. "That told me that although these people had died a long time ago, the memory does linger — and that they realize these people lived, had relationships and families."

The guest books gave Stevens the idea for another meaningful element for her exhibit. She photographed the guest book pages, enlarged them onto card stock, and encouraged visitors to share their own thoughts. You're then asked to place your card on the ledge under a photograph that you find particularly moving.

"My hope is that those who see this exhibit will have learned something about memory being far more enduring than we'd like to believe," she adds. "This show has become a memorial in and of itself."

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