

facing – recovering

firstsite is marking the First World War centennial year with the exhibition *facing-recovering*, the result of a year long residency in which artist Jevan Watkins Jones was based at the Chavasse VC House, Personnel Recovery Centre at Colchester Garrison, working with injured soldiers as they move from military service to civilian life as veterans.

As a centre for the contemporary visual arts based in Colchester, firstsite is one of a new generation of institutions in the UK that innovate on a national scale through strong partnerships developed on a local level. Our work with Colchester Garrison is an integral part of this approach recently delivered through our Experimental Communities programme, funded by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation, in which we employ artists to devise, develop and deliver programmes of socially engaged practice across the town.

firstsite's award-winning building sits upon groundwork built up using rubble from demolished Garrison buildings, suggestive of a mutually supportive partnership between the two institutions at a structural level. The fact that Jevan represents a new model for a war artist – spending 52 days at the Chavasse VC House, Personnel Recovery Centre meant he developed strong relationships with the staff and soldiers, in stark contrast to the traditional war artists' experience of being quickly helicoptered in and out of military bases in war zones.

Drawing was used to enter into communication with the soldiers and each participant was issued with a sketchbook whilst Jevan undertook his 'field notes' that provide such an illuminating commentary to the project in this publication. Each participant has worked with Jevan to select the exhibition, which ultimately represents a series of portraits that reveal a face behind the military uniform.

This project was only achievable through a strong strategic partnership and I should like to take this opportunity to thank Colchester Garrison and staff at the Chavasse VC House, Personnel Recovery Centre, The Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the artist Jevan Watkins Jones. In addition staff in the Learning and Communication teams at firstsite have been instrumental to the delivery of the exhibition and publication, for which Peter Jenkinson OBE has written a thoughtful and insightful essay. Finally my heartfelt thanks must go to the nine soldiers that collaborated with Jevan on this project, they have been so open in exploring the complex challenges and environments that they have faced at a critical time of transition and recovery.

Matthew Rowe
Director, firstsite

Saturday 15 February – Sunday 30 March 2014

facing-recovering was conceived from a year-long partnership between firstsite and Chavasse VC House, Personnel Recovery Centre at Colchester Garrison. firstsite Associate Artist Jevan Watkins Jones engaged directly with the injured soldiers about their experiences in and outside of conflict.

Field notes: Jevan Watkins Jones

The following texts are distilled from my weekly field notes, November 2012 to August 2013. The writing is placed alongside the soldiers work for the purpose of adding further context and value to the sensitive images and objects made public in the exhibition. Together they represent a meaningful and useful counterpoint between art and life, in this case, a space where soldier/civilian and soldier/artist traverse. The exhibition comes at a time when UK troops are set to leave Afghanistan and we re-address the impact on the lives of those affected whilst serving in the forces. Connecting with the lives of these soldiers has been a privilege.

Through the vehicle of drawing came a depth of conversation that took us to unexpected places. One of these places was that soldiers and veterans, as professional people, function at a high level visually. Another was that because emotions were often at the surface, there was a natural receptivity to my ‘talking drawing’ in close relation to experiences being processed in the injured soldier’s transition or first steps into civilian life. Where a common ground may have seemed forced; a working relationship was founded. The sketchbook provided an initial platform to broker this. Twelve were handed out to twelve men as a private space to draw and write in and to choose to share with me or not. Four I have seen, one of which was lost, another I have lost touch with and the rest have yet to be seen.

Lost drawing, 2012

Digital print on Tyveck®

Dan O’Connor
Ex-Signaller, The 216 Parachute
Signals Squadron



Maps, whether photographic topographies or schematic operational plans, form the mainstay of communication on the ground for the military. This personal map bears witness to a young soldier’s life-changing incident when he was crushed by an out of control civilian Afghan lorry whilst searching vehicles at an entrance to Lashkar Gah, Afghanistan. He was 20 and had been due home 3 weeks later. The map was drawn with the subject’s non-writing hand in a retelling of the incident. The act of drawing left the space charged and the space between us silent.

To soften the blow he points out the likeness between the scar tissue left from a skin graft on his arm and the shape of a plaster graft made by the artist Marcel Duchamp on a drawing of a face in profile, in the book open on the studio table. “They put mine on upside down ... look the hair grows upwards!” Dan laughed.

Reference: Marcel Duchamp, *With my Tongue in my Cheek*, 1959.

Interlocking Arcs of Fire, 2012

4:29 minute looped digital video
made on the artists’ mobile phone

Anonymous recovering service personnel



After a day at firstsite with two injured soldiers, a faint drawing exists on my palm. In the drawing remained the signs (my lines) of concentric circles associated with a range card and the angular over drawing by an individual who had served as a Para. I had asked them to draw on their own palms and chart significant observations from the terrain that surrounds the gallery. One soldier took my palm and drew out a set of interlocking arcs of fire. “This is how you do it,” he remarked. The soldier had marked me with his military expertise on the flesh of my palm – the palm of a hand that can pull a trigger or be raised openly in submission. The video records the tying together of the applications of conflict and those who carry it out as recorded on the hand of a civilian.

Untitled, 1999

Digital print

© European Press Photo Agency (EPA)

Russ Sinclair

Ex-Corporal, 23 PARA Field Ambulance
RAMC



I spotted the thumbnail of this photograph on the veteran soldier's personal desktop – a flesh-pink baby in camouflaged arms. The image presents the horror and the purpose of war in the same breath. It first appeared to the public in The Sun Newspaper in 1999. Here the impact of the image is re-presented, set alone without the surrounding body of text reminding us of the impact of images of war such as Don McCullin's photograph of a shell-shocked US soldier waiting for transportation in Vietnam, 1968. Second-hand to most of us, the graphic portrayal of such soldiers and civilians, caught up in action, reminds us of the human price paid for our freedom and democracy.

Maimed Man, 2012

Iraqi Road and Debris Heaps, 2013

Snatch Accident 2013

Pencil on paper

Josh Green

Ex-Private, 2 Royal Anglian



There is something about the position of the body and the look in his eyes that tell us he's not dead. We sense the soldier responsible has not left the image – the man he has shot to bring down and disarm is present in him. What we don't see is that the soldier's duties have turned to patching the man up before he was transferred to the Shaibah Logistics Base outside Basrah, 2008, where he later tracks him down.

The second image is of an Iraqi landscape. Josh Green talks to me about the strangeness of a peaceful drive on the Iraqi road, "No buildings, no people – what are we shooting at?" The image doesn't add up in the soldier's mind. It looks like the perfect holiday destination, not the hostile war zone the soldier has been prepared for. The heaped debris points to the destruction. Nash is in this soldier-draughtsman's blood. Brothers Paul and John Nash served as infantrymen in the Artists' Rifles. John Nash became an official war artist in 1918.

Josh Green was injured at night when the fast moving Snatch vehicle he was in turned over. He was rendered unfit for service. He is battling with the complexities of his own Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He spoke to me about where to 'file' these sorts of images that lodge like a splinter in his psyche. He spoke in ways I relate to as an artist. "We need graphical evidence," Josh stated eloquently.

Father and son's military artefacts, 1982 and 2008

Caps, badges, belts and photographs

Courtesy of Dean Mullarkey
Lance Corporal, 3rd Battalion
The Parachute Regiment



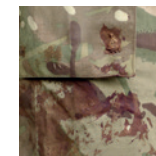
Shown to me with tenderness and pride, and now mounted amongst cap and badges, is a treasured photograph of Dean Mullarkey's father, a Commando Engineer with 59 CDO present at the time of the Argentines surrender to British troops in Port Stanley, Falklands, 1982 after 74 days of conflict. His son, Dean Mullarkey, a Para of the 3rd Battalion, occupies the frame beside him in the same manner and is seen here serving in the area of Sangin, awaiting a Chinook for re-supplies.

In stark contrast, Dean was injured in a motorcycle collision, whilst being chased by an Apache helicopter across farmland in the UK, on a night exercise. He is unfit to continue serving. The careful presentation of these personal artifacts recalls the many fathers and sons, mothers and daughters who have served for generations down the line – each in possession of their own story and a story passed on.

Mo's combat trousers, 2011

Lee 'Mo' Morris

Ex-Private, 1 PARA



Mo dropped his trousers in the canteen on our first encounter. I had been talking to Mo and Dean about their tattoos and whether they were more prevalent than ever among servicemen. I was reminded of Malcom Bradbury's book *Illustrated Man* – skin alive with stories under the camouflage. Mo, larger than life, moved on to his scar tissue, revealing the effect of the blast through 38 staples in his leg, 50 stitches in his back and more, as another badge of honour. Mo had been patrolling in the Nad-Ali District when he was hit by the blast of a Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG). I wondered if he saw his combat trousers as a personal trophy of survival. In the company of Mo, the combats, though bloodied and tattered, do not appear to be a relic, the vestige of a lost world – are they the image of a contemporary hero in human form? Now, I wonder how we measure up to them?

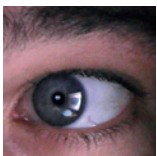
Eye Crowd, 2013

2:30 minute looped digital video

Josh Green

Ex-Private, 2 Royal Anglian

Edited by Cinzia Cremona



Shot in the dark, the soldier searched for his drawn eye within his own eye, through the reflected image on his laptop. Josh Green stated, "I am interested in the viewer's perception of something I have drawn from my perception." The eye, and what it serves to do and say, matters to this soldier. We experimented in the studio with a digital video camera. I asked, "can you see your eye in your eye?" "In this camera you can turn your eye to face you," Cinzia Cremona demonstrates. I am in mind of the photograph *To Reverse Ones Eyes*, 1970, by artist Guiseppe Penone, in which the artist is pictured wearing mirrored contact lenses, symbolically blinding himself from society in order to see inside his body and mind. We bring it up on screen. Josh tells us "...cameras are one of the main tools used to protect ourselves in active service." We watch ourselves move drawing into video, and self into self, seen by the other.

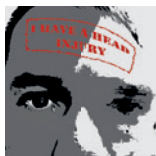
We break for Josh to have a cigarette, "If you can visualise it, you can do it," he says.

I Have a Brain Injury, 2013

Digital manipulation of photographic self-portrait

Nick Hendry

Sergeant, The 23rd Engineers Regiment (Air Assault) Diving Supervisor and Plant Fitter



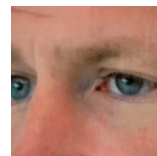
"I feel like writing 'I have a brain injury' on my forehead and walking around with it," the soldier Nick Hendry entrusted to me. The thought of the action was strong and the effect provocative. The soldier, who rediscovered his artistic gifts having regained consciousness after 25 days in a coma, brands himself. The soldier, in one sense, remonstrates his current state of mental health, in another, makes a personal declaration on his journey to recovery and, in a third sense, positions this altering of self-image intentionally in the exhibition to raise public awareness of brain injury among soldiers.

"It is vital we acknowledge unseen injuries."
Nick Hendry

Luke Hardy, 2013

30 minute looped digital video

Luke Hardy

Ex-Private, 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment Sniper & Combat Medic Class 1
Filmed and edited by Cinzia Cremona

Luke Hardy speaks with Jevan Watkins Jones about his life as a Sniper and a Combat Medic, an injured soldier (non-military incident) and now a civilian. Answering five questions he wrote for other soldiers to explore the same phases of their own changing lives, Luke Hardy shares candid moments and honest thoughts. No other soldiers accepted the open invitation to take part, therefore this video portrays the unique experience of one man. My presence behind the camera focuses the gaze on the relationship between the artist, the drawing, Luke Hardy and the viewer.
Cinzia Cremona

"There's art everywhere – art is the perception of life."
Luke Hardy

Man looking at his former reflection, 2013

Pencil drawing

Soldier's missing limb photograph, 2014
Photograph*Prosthetic leg*

Matty Woollard

Ex-Private, 1 Royal Anglian



"I wanna draw it so it matters" veteran soldier, Matty Woollard declares. Poignantly the broken bulrush points to the reflection of his former self, whole-bodied before a landmine tore his leg off in Kajaki Dam, Afghanistan, 2007. Matty was 18 at the time and six weeks into his tour. The man studies his reflection conjoining past and present. *Narcissus* does not exist in this reflection. What does exist is the importance of remembering what was before, and what is now, in coming to terms with disfigurement.

Reference: Caravaggio, *Narcissus*, 1597–1599

Alongside this drawing is the photographic image of the veteran's raw stump, carried on his mobile phone, first presented to me in the gallery café. The image is testament to the brutal realities of war, first charted systematically in drawings by Sir Charles Bell, surgeon and artist, in the Battle of Waterloo, 1815. Images of this nature, it appears, need to be seen by their subjects and by a media-centric world, where only the most hard-hitting images hit home and affect a change.

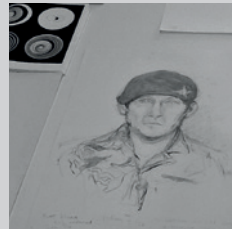
Journeys into the unknown: the artistic face of conflict

In this year, as we approach the centenary of the First World War, we will all be forcefully reminded of, and forced to reflect upon, the prominent role that warfare and military action has taken up in all of our lives since 'The Great War' first broke out in August 1914. Since then war has been a constant across the world and Colchester, as a military base since the Roman invasion, has played its own particular role in this endeavour over the last fractious century.

Today, through the pervasiveness of mass and social media – on our televisions, radios, computers and phones – we continue to be faced on a daily basis with the stark realities and consequences of conflict across the globe. No one is unaffected by this. The bombardment of words and images is relentless. But, beyond the loud headlines and the flickering screens, how much do we really know about what is happening and how it affects civilians and soldiers alike? Where else might we look to see or hear different perspectives than that which the mainstream media, and the Hollywood machine, imposes upon us? Might artists offer us a new way of looking, feeling or thinking?

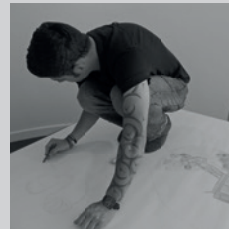
Artists, including soldier artists, have long been eyewitnesses to war, feeding back their reflections through drawing, painting and sculpture, literature, music and song, theatre, photography and film. Since 1916 we have also had a tradition in this country of "official" war artists commissioned to produce works representing or commemorating lives spent on the fighting front, from the Somme to Iraq and Afghanistan today, and on the home front. Much of this work has burned into popular memory.

But Jevan Watkin Jones's year-long project working closely with a small group of injured soldiers at the Colchester Garrison represents a rare and perhaps welcome departure from this celebrated tradition. Between November 2012 and August 2013 Jevan was based for one day each week in the new Personnel Recovery Centre engaging soldiers in conversations, most often based in the canteen, about their personal experiences in Afghanistan and about their journey from soldier to civilian, exploring the act of drawing as a means of communicating these experiences.



“Boot black is not natural / You can see the sole of someone's boots / There are no straight lines in nature / You break up the human form with camo. / We walk in straight lines / We look for the abnormal amongst the normal / We observe the pattern of life.”

Dean Mullarkey



This was an artistic process that is of necessity more intimate, quieter and slower than the more immediate practice of war artists who are expected to create cultural products for almost immediate public circulation. It is a process that involves a great deal of talking and the gradual building of mutual trust and understanding between people – soldiers and artists – whose paths would not normally cross in everyday working life and who therefore know very little about one another from the outset.

Jevan's primary medium of artistic production, and his passion, is drawing – making marks – and it helped that the practice of drawing is not something that is entirely new to many soldiers. Although we imagine that high-tech military machines tackle most tasks in war zones, the basic human skill of drawing and scribing, that all of us learned as children and most of us swiftly unlearned as adults, is still in need today. Drawing maps and charts using such drafting tools as easels, templates and compasses; making scale drawings of roads, airfields, buildings and other military projects; conducting land surveys and panoramas; drawing diagrams for wiring and plumbing of structures or sketching out firing positions and arcs of fire – these are just some of the ways in which drawing remains a living skill for regular operational purposes amongst soldiers on the front line, providing Jevan with a valuable starting point for discussion. Each of the soldiers was issued with a sketchbook to make their own private notes and drawings and these became a catalyst for ongoing conversations – what Jevan has called “drawing conversationally” – throughout the year, including critical discussions about the assumed difference between purely 'practical' and more 'artistic' drawing practice.

The resulting thoughtful and poignant exhibition *facing-recovering* presented at firstsite offers us, as spectators, glimpses into very private worlds normally restricted from public view, inviting us to be open and curious, to make our own imaginative leaps and to forge connections between things – drawings, photographs, film and objects – in order to put stories together. These are complex and powerful stories about our own preconceptions and expectations of the role of the soldier today and perhaps about our own stereotypes and

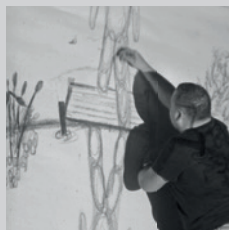
prejudices too. These are also stories, requiring even closer attention from us as viewers and as fellow human beings, of the personal reflections of soldiers on what they have experienced and where they are at this point in time. Thus the exhibition is an invitation for us to create and speculate, and then think about, our own responses to what we have seen and heard.

facing-recovering, as a project and as an exhibition, is, I'd like to suggest, important in three ways.

Firstly it reflects a growing movement in artists practice in the UK and internationally – practice that prioritises a process and not just a final product, and is therefore often invisible to most of us. Such practice demands from the artist different skills than simply being technically accomplished in a certain artistic medium, say painting or stagecraft, though these skills remain vital. In a more process-based project, such as that devised by Jevan in the Colchester Garrison, the artist needs a broader range of skills and aptitudes which can include the ability to listen, to negotiate, mediate, translate or build unusual connections, to be perennially open to unknown outcomes and to be flexible, to empathise and show compassion and patience, to relish complexity, risk and ambiguity and most of all to maintain a constant sense of curiosity and the desire to investigate and experiment in responsible ways. All of these can be seen in the long period of work that has led to this exhibition.

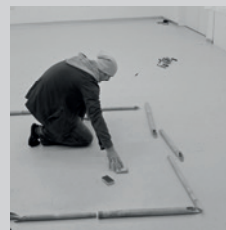
Secondly *facing-recovering* is important because it reflects another shift in art-making today, one in which we the public are no longer always simply passive audiences, or alternatively the subject matter, for art and artists. Increasingly we can also be directly involved in art processes as active partners and critics and shapers, leading to much richer and deeper experiences and understandings. From the outset of this project Jevan invited the soldiers involved to be genuine collaborators with him and not just objects to be studied, as if they were in a human zoo. As the work progressed, and latterly as the exhibition was devised, everyone was part of the many decisions that needed to be made.

And thirdly the project highlights the new role that art can and does play in having a true social value and a positive impact on people's lives. In this century publicly-supported



**“It’s important to
show the people of
Colchester that
behind the uniform
they see walking
through their town,
there is an individual,
a human being,
someone the same as
them in many ways,
not just ‘a soldier.”**

Luke Hardy



galleries and other arts institutions are increasingly making strenuous efforts to forge new and lasting relationships with their communities, and with constituencies of all kinds, that may not traditionally have had connections with artists and the complex, and from the outside at least sometimes confusing or incomprehensible, world of art. It is no longer simply a case of opening the doors and expecting people to arrive. Many galleries, with firstsite foremost amongst them, are exploring the many ways that art and artists can not only reflect communities but build communities too. And artists are choosing to work not just in their studios – the garrets of popular myth – but also in wider society: in schools, hospitals, prisons, homeless shelters, the legal system, mental health institutions, refugee centres, or, as in this case, although it is much rarer, in military communities, with exciting and often unexpected positive results.

facing-recovering is a bold experiment, provoking fresh thinking and feeling about military concerns and it is to the credit of the garrison, the soldiers, the gallery and the artist alike that they were all prepared to take the risk and set out on so uncharted a path. It is perhaps too early to assess precisely the impact of this experimental collaborative process on the individuals most closely involved but what is already clear is that Jevan's project has opened up a new space for ongoing gallery-convened and artist-shaped conversations and relationships with, and within, the Garrison, and in the town of Colchester more widely, that I hope will mature and flourish in the years to come. I hope too that it will inspire similar bold experiments far beyond and a new and wider conversation about the theatre of war and its effects today.

Peter Jenkinson OBE
Independent Cultural Broker

With thanks to

Soldiers and veterans involved in the project

Josh Green
Luke Hardy
Nick Hendry
Dan O'Connor
Lee 'Mo' Morris
Dean Mullarkey
Anonymous soldier
Russ Sinclair
Matty Woollard

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Terri Phipps
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Carol Gunfield & Angela Tillett, Front of House
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Captain Andy Perkowski
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Contributing soldiers

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Al Gage
Marty Wilson
John Newcombe & Blue the dog
Jasper Smith
Brian Evans
Scott Meenagh

firstsite

Matthew Rowe
Wayne Warner
Judith Merritt
Sue Hogan
Beth Hull
Bethan Lewis
Associate Artists (2011–13)
Jes Fernie
Lindsay Bennington
Lydia Polom
Nicole Yip
Amy McGarry
Martha Rios-Hall
Lib Fox
Amy Turnbull
Freddy Slater
Bethan Briggs-Miller
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