

PROFESSION



"Devastation," a sculpture by John Fortune, MD, is composed of digital images on fixation frames and "found" material such as dogtags and surgical hardware.

Exhibit channels emotional -- and orthopedic -- wounds of war

A traveling show displays artworks, some created from "a dark place." Many are by surgeons and the warriors they strive to heal.

By **KEVIN B. O'REILLY**, amednews staff. *Posted July 25, 2011.*

Chicago -- A photograph captures an Afghan girl's tears as her wrist injury is examined. A painting bursting with color shows the explosive effect of a roadside bomb. A mixed-media piece portrays the emotional turmoil some physicians experience after treating traumatic war injuries.

These pieces -- created by orthopedic surgeons who have cared for those wounded in wartime -- are just a few of the striking artworks on display through Aug. 31 as part of a free exhibit at the Chicago Cultural Center.

More than 44,000 members of the U.S. Armed Forces have been wounded in action in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East since 2001, says the U.S. Dept. of Defense. About 70% of the injuries are musculoskeletal, and 7% involve major extremity wounds resulting in the loss of a limb, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons.

The academy is the principal organizer of the display, "Wounded in Action: An Art Exhibition of Orthopaedic Advancements," which features more than 100 pieces of sculpture, paintings, photographs and other media, including the work of 27 artists who are orthopedic surgeons.

"We thought this was a wonderful way to honor people who have been injured in combat and honor the orthopedic surgeons who have cared for them," said Karen Hackett, the academy's CEO. "This is a way of educating the public about the work of orthopedic surgeons and -- even more important -- showcasing what happens to the wounded warriors, living their lives and what they go through in serving our country."

Treating veterans, operating in war

Many of the physician-created works convey profound empathy and admiration for those wounded in action.

"One thing I have definitely noticed in the veterans who I have treated is that there is something different from other patients about their mentality," said John Fortune, MD, a Los Gatos, Calif., orthopedic surgeon whose work is included in the exhibit. "I don't know if it's just their discipline or their mental toughness, but these people are a joy to take care of."

His piece, "Devastation," is a sculpture partly constructed from fixation frames used to treat complex fractures suffered by trauma victims. The frames hold up three images that convey pain, grief, injury and death. The work, which Dr. Fortune said "came from a dark place," can be seen as reflecting the



Dr. Fortune

limits of what surgeons can do to heal the wounds of war.

"We do so much to put people back together, but we can't do anything to fix the emotions and the other things that happen because of these awful, awful injuries," Dr. Fortune said.

For orthopedic surgeons operating in the theater of war, creating art is an outlet for their intense professional experiences.

"It is hard to understand the physicality of wartime surgery," said Col. Damian Rispoli, MD, who did three tours of duty in Iraq and whose mixed-media piece, "Things That We Carry," is on display. "The noises, the smells, the visual images, the fatigue, the oppressive heat -- the overwhelming package. No matter how you were dressed or what you were doing, you felt the OR in every pore of your body. There was no escaping it, no family to come home to or change of venue that would lessen the impact of the experience."



Dr. Rispoli

The academy organized an art exhibit to mark its 75th anniversary in 2009 and solicited pieces for the current exhibit by tapping its membership list and other sources. The Orthopaedic Research Society, Orthopaedic Trauma Assn. and the Society of Military Orthopaedic Surgeons also sponsored the exhibit, which will travel to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio in September and then go to Fort Carson, Colo., in January 2012.

The academy also has published a coffee table book compiling the art in the exhibit. To purchase the book, call 800-626-6726, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Central time Monday through Friday. The charge is \$14.95 for shipping and handling.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

WEBLINK

"Wounded in Action: An Art Exhibition of Orthopaedic Advancements" (www.woundedinactionart.org)

Upcoming exhibitions of "Wounded in Action" (www.woundedinactionart.org/exhibits.php)

Art gallery of John Fortune, MD (www.pbase.com/johnebones)

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (www.aaos.org)

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