



WAR & PEACE

Linda Bond believes there's a difference between the statement "NO WAR" and the proposition "WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER": it is the difference between an aggressive single-minded protest and a meditative awareness. Hers is an art of awareness.

Shortly before September 11, 2001, Linda was making a series of powdered graphite smoke drawings (smoke from fires, volcanoes, bombs); in response to the trauma of 9/11 she made a diptych of smoke rising from the World Trade Center and the smoke resulting from the retaliatory US bombing in Afghanistan which killed 3000 people. History repeats itself: after a helicopter with 30 Americans (including elite Navy Seals) was shot down in Afghanistan on August 6, 2011, the US military announced that the Taliban insurgents supposedly responsible for the attack had been targeted and killed on August 10. Perhaps we don't need Tolstoy to observe, as he did, that war is about killing, the more people slaughtered the greater the merit, injury to one party must be followed by injury to the other. If nothing else, war is morally ambiguous.

In such a situation Linda feels that everyone is a victim, everyone a potential terrorist, and she wonders what brings people to a place of abstraction rather than compassion. Looking at the rows of fingerprints she has carefully placed on strips of vintage World War II gauze, Linda says this is what it is about, each fingerprint representing a human casualty, the tragedy of all human lives lived and lost in Iraq and Afghanistan. First she carefully assembled statistics, military and civilian casualties, Iraq and Afghanistan (she began as a math major in college and thus has a fondness for numbers, order and in general a compulsion to organize). And then using her large and impressive hands, she fingerprinted the delicate strips of gauze, white strips for Afghanistan and what was billed as "camouflage" color (but is actually a white person's skin color) for Iraq, one inch wide strips for civilians and two inch wide for military personnel. She gets about 350 prints on the 16 foot long gauze strips, attaches about 40 strips to each of 10 metal rods so that the strips will hang to the floor ending in small coils, with the metal rods suspended from the ceiling marching in rows down the room. In this way she has visually documented the more than 140,000 estimated casualties incurred thus far in the on-going wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

How was she able to spend more than 300 hours on a project that might seem gloomy to some? She finds that her studio is a refuge, fingerprinting the gauze is like saying the rosary, mindfulness meditation, bringing awareness of both her feelings of compassion and the privilege of her experience. She doesn't want to talk about violence in an exploitative way, she doesn't have specific solutions to policy issues, she's not a screamer, doesn't expect to have any effect on Washington. How do I treat people I don't agree with? she asks. Do I want to see them shot? Or is there room to understand other points of view? She thinks we need to be less reactive, less subject to greed, hate and delusion. She hopes her work suggests to viewers that they might in their own lives make a difference—maybe just by being kind to a grouchy neighbor.

It's hard to get her to talk about aesthetic issues in her work. What looks better and why seems to flow naturally. She knew that the different colors and sizes of gauze strips had to mean something and that the strips had to hang down—and then the rest sort of happened. She was intrigued to discover that the "fingerprint" of a bullet resembles the fingerprints she was putting on the gauze strips. She does also consciously avoid color, it can be a distraction, she says, and of course black and white is traditional in the history of western art for war imagery because of its use in the history of printmaking and in the development of newspapers, this last being one of her main resources. For her drawings in graphite and gunpowder derived from newspaper imagery, she uses the darker, blacker tones of graphite to set off the paler gray of the gunpowder, her use of gunpowder inspired in part by the Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang who actually ignites his work. She has had to get a firearms license in order to work with gunpowder, an ironic twist on the notion that the only official justification for the possession of firearms is self-defense.