

The Veteran's Lens was the result of months of intensive identity work conducted by Art Therapist Beryl Brenner with men and woman at the Veterans Support Center. Following the photographic workshops conducted by Whitney Educator Melanie Adsit and artist Nina Berman, the portraits created became the subject of intense exploration and analysis for the individuals in the art therapy group. Each of the veterans worked with Ms. Brenner to develop an analysis of their image and what they intended to share about themselves through the choices that they made. Their explanations are included here as a testament to the therapeutic value of these exercises and are intended as a guide for viewers of the work.

Lawrence Costello, *Defense*

Larry, as he is called by all who know him, is a Vietnam Veteran. He indicates that he is a private person by nature. His body language confirms this. He wraps his arms around his stomach as a protective barrier.

Nikiia Harrison, *Nikiia's Prayer*

Nikiia's portrait emphasizes her sweet side. She is an honest, giving and caring person. She knows that at times other people will perceive her to be vulnerable and try to take advantage of these traits. However, she also knows that these can be strengths. She is photographed praying for happiness.

Candido Lopez, *Looking At the Past*

Candido is a Vietnam Veteran who often "searches" for the impact that this experience had on the rest of his life. He is photographed facing the past and looking quite serious as military service is a significant matter.

Orlando Encarnación, *Military Pose*

Orlando's pose displays a veteran's stance of strength. He is most comfortable in an environment where rules are in place as they provide structure. In addition, he enjoys the camaraderie that the veteran experience provides participants with. This is a familiar place for him.

Orlando Encarnación, *The World Outside*

Orlando gazes out the window and looks out at the world outside the Veteran Support Center. It is a different world than the one in which he and his fellow veterans inhabit because the issues that are specific to veterans seem strange to outsiders. However, for veterans the world outside can seem strange because people tend to be less loving and interconnected.

Orlando Encarnación, *Lost In Thought*

Orlando gazes towards the future. He has reached a point in his life where his military experience is over and he contemplates what will happen next.

Juan Muñoz, *Waiting to Enter*

Juan is standing outside the door. The photograph is a powerful because he is facing toward the past while simultaneously waiting to go through the door and enter into the future. These two periods of time within his personal history appear to be existing simultaneously and indeed they exist within his mind. He explores what has passed as well as what is about to happen.

Juan Muñoz, *Amber Hands Grabbing For Life*

Juan indicated that he someone really wanted to understand him they would have to see some of his artwork. In this photo his hands show off a small sculpture of his hands. As is the case with so many of the other veterans in this exhibition, he has been through experiences that the average person could not even comprehend. At the present moment, he wishes to experience life fully and completely.

Cynthia Clay, *Veteran Buddies*

Cynthia is photographed alongside her veteran pal William Romero. Although at times, she is confronted by her own sad private thoughts, like many veterans she comes alive when she is in the presence of other veterans. Veterans will often confide things to other veterans that they would not dream of telling anyone else. They know that these are the folks that will understand.

Jim Burns, *Serious*

Jim Burns has been a serious man for much of his life. His photo portrays him as such. He is an empathetic human being and a good interpreter. He is pictured listening to a fellow veteran. He gives him is full attention and he pays close attention to details. It is this trait that benefited him when he faced danger in Vietnam.

Carlos Cole, *Who Am I*

Carlos served in Iraq and has been attempting to transition to civilian life. As an American veteran, his primary role was that of a protector. He has experienced pain but he indicates that he is trying to have hope for the future. He says that “creative self-expression helps him to communicate where he is at and what he is feeling.” Some things are best communicated through images.

William Romero, *Goofing Around*

Will is the president of the Veteran’s Support Center. In this photograph, he strikes a humorous pose. Though he reaches out to people who are having a bad day, he also knows how to have fun with his fellow veterans.

William Romero, *Peeking*

Will peeks through the blinds and stares towards the future. He states that he feels he is “pensive and exploratory.” He looks forward to seeing what the future will bring.

William Romero, *Feeling Happy*

The role of veterans within this community is to provide mutual support for each other. Will tries to bring a relaxed atmosphere to the community and this is very good for the others because it helps to improve their quality of life. He is seen smiling and feeling good. A Vietnam veteran who served his country, raised a family and worked hard all of his life, Will states that “he is happier now than he has ever been before.”

Jorge Merly, *In the Mirror*

Jorge states that he is “experiencing a period of self-discovery”. He studies his image in the mirror and tries to figure out who he is.

Freddie Sabat, *Navy Man*

Freddie stares at his image and his image stares back at him. He wears a Navy cap with camouflage indicating that he is proud of his service to his country.

Freddie Sabat, *Quietly Observing*

Freddie quietly peeks through a hole. He does not reveal himself but he is aware of his environment. This is a skill that many veterans are taught because it often saves their lives in dangerous situations.

Freddie Sabat, *New York Veteran*

Freddie is not just any veteran but a New York veteran. He views himself as “bold and caring” just like the city that he lives in.

Henry Gomez, *Silent Gaze*

Henry is an Iraq veteran. This picture portrays him as a man who is deep in personal thoughts. Like many of the other veterans shown in this exhibition, Henry is a very intelligent and introspective person.

Roberto Fuentes, *Intensity*

Roberto is an Iraq war veteran whose personality is that of a protector. He is a person who is “willing to help others.” He takes this role very seriously.

Roberto Fuentes, *Army Man*

Roberto’s torso reveals his identity. He indicates that his tattoos show Army values as well as the names of fallen comrades. In addition, he has the names of his children on his muscle. He is very proud of the fact that he is a good father and this is important to him.

Roberto Fuentes, *Brenda*

Roberto beams with pride as he shows off his wife Brenda’s name tattooed to his chest. He is very thankful for his wife and his family.