

November 1, 2012

Artist and Marine veteran Ehren Tool reconciles through clay



Veteran and ceramist Ehren Tool, a visiting artist at Herron School of Art and Design.



Cups by Ehren Tool
Images courtesy of the artist

Ehren Tool, visiting lecturer and studio technician at the University of California Berkeley, was totally fine when he returned from service as a Marine veteran of Desert Storm in 2001. He didn't want to talk about it, and he especially didn't feel the need to be around other veterans.

Over time, he said, the callow civilian translation of the unspeakable acts of war—"of my uniform and my gas mask turned into video games"—began to bug him. Like a healed-over sliver of glass, something was itching to get out.

Tool had not had an art class since high school, but he was pulled toward art, clay in particular. "Ceramics is a perfect medium to talk about war," he said. "It's of an appropriate scale, a very personal thing. Ceramics is hand to hand. You push your finger in, it makes the mark. You pull a trigger with your finger. The transformation of clay by fire, in human terms, is forever. You shoot somebody, it's forever."

Tool will speak at two public events during his time as a visiting artist at Herron School of Art and Design.

In conjunction with the Spirit and Place Festival, on Sunday, Nov. 11, he will be a part of "Veterans Reclaim Armistice Day: Healing through the Humanities" along with students from Herron's first cohort of art therapy master's degree candidates and Director of Art Therapy Juliet King. A panel discussion begins at 1:45 p.m. at the Indiana War Memorial, and Tool will be on site to create cups in response to the day's events. These works will be shown in subsequent exhibits at the IUPUI Campus Center and in Herron's Eskenazi Fine Arts Center. To register for this event, go to <http://www.spiritandplace.org/Festival.aspx?access=Details&Year=2012&EventScheduleID=647>.

Since 2001, Tool has made 14,000 cups. "The cups make a place to have a conversation," he said, a vessel for filling, and for emptying. The cups contain images for those who have experienced war, and for those who can never really know what it is like.

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On November 14, Tool will speak at Herron in the Basile Auditorium of Eskenazi Hall at 6:00 p.m.

The art Tool makes began as a catharsis of his war experiences and “overlaps with guys coming back now,” he said. “War is unlike anything else. You come back a bad man, or not bad enough, so it’s always good to talk to a fellow vet. War is a really dark space and it can be hard to leave it. If my talks help anyone else, it’s icing.”

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