

The Art of War: Lt. Col. David Richardson, 'Trojan War Years'

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Photo by Samuel Ailor

"I've never felt the military was some type of door that, once you walked through it, it would close your life to artistic pursuit," says Lt. Col. David Richardson, a Marine (for 19 years now) and painter (for life). Before he heads to Afghanistan in February, he'll see his solo exhibition, "Trojan War Years," draw to a close at the Ralls Collection on Jan. 29.

Why paint the Trojan War?

I was teaching "The Evolution of Warfare" at George Washington University. At the time I'd begun the series, I was using some references to "The Iliad." It's probably personal, too. Between 2001 and 2003, the wars were kicking up. There was a bit of a yearning to be with my unit, with my friends.

Has your military experience influenced your painting style?

I developed my artistic style separately. But the Marine Corps did send me to Asia, and the visuals in Japan and Korea had a big impact on my work.

How so?

Their subtle manner, particularly how the Japanese express themselves, affected me.

Will you paint what you see in Afghanistan?

I intend to do some figurative drawings. I kept a sketchbook when I was in Iraq, but I've never shown those works. Eventually, I'll have a show that relates not just to my experience, but the experience of 20th- and 21st-century warfare.

The New York Times labeled you an artist/warrior. Are you proof someone can be both?

The painter H.C. Westermann was a Marine. So was Richard Diebenkorn. Joseph Conrad spent 20 years in the British Merchant Marine. I grew up painting. I brought it into the Marine Corps. I've remained a painter, and I intend to paint when I leave.