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New Photography / Claire Beckett's In Training: Soldiers before War



October 30, 2008 | New Photography | by Alison Zavos STARRED |

Boston-based photographer Claire Beckett earned a BA in Anthropology from Kenyon College and an MFA in Photography from the Massachusetts College of Art. Her photo series — In Training: Soldiers Before War — was inspired by the two years she spent as a part of the Peace Corps Volunteers in the Republic of Benin, West Africa. We interviewed her about it: **How did this project begin?** 'I was drawn to this subject initially in late 2004, around the time that there was a lot in the news about the lack of up-armored humvees (the armor necessary to protect soldiers). At that time, we weren't allowed to see photographs of the coffins of deceased soldiers. I felt a strong compulsion to make work on the subject because I thought it deserved more attention than it was getting. I have stayed with the work because I still find the subject moving, and because it really interests me'.

You seem to have shot many more women than men for this series. Is this intentional? 'I don't believe that this work deals especially with gender other than the reality that gender is always with us in this world. I probably photographed about the same number of men as women, but in my experience the women were more open and their photographs were more to my liking'.

What is your level of access while shooting at Basic or Pre-Basic Training? 'The biggest challenge of access is getting in the gates in the first place. This can take many months of phone calls, emails and proving my credentials. Once I am in the training facilities I generally find that I have access to almost anything I would want to photograph. Both the soldiers and the officers tend to be enthusiastic about working with me and they help me make the photographs that I want to make'.

What has been the biggest discovery while working on this series of young soldiers? 'Before embarking on this project, I knew very little about contemporary soldiers or the military. Most of what I'd known up this point came from family stories of World War II and Vietnam. I did not personally know any members of the Armed Services, so the entire thing has been an education'.

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Hmmm, hmmm. These **cake designs** are so creative, so compellingly original, that it would almost be a shame to eat them. Almost! [Read more](#)



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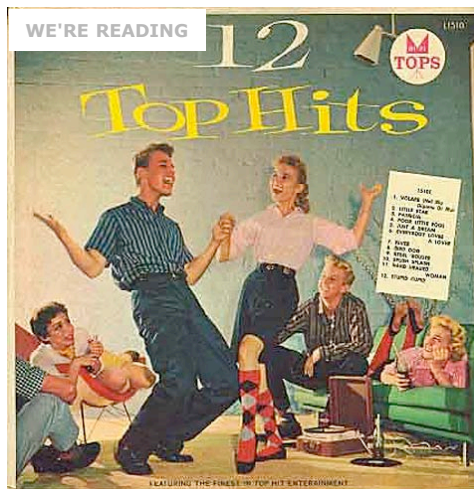


'The most important thing that I've learned is that there is a tremendous variety among soldiers in terms of their personal biographies, their motivations and their politics. In the circles that I frequent there tends to be a set of beliefs about who soldiers are, and this often casts our young soldiers as uninformed victims. This attitude really bothers me because it robs soldiers of their agency. We do not have a draft in the United States today. Everyone who enlists does so by her or his own choice. Yes, we have an unjust socio-economic system in America, but it is a mistake to cast soldiers exclusively as victims of this system.

'I have observed that for certain soldiers joining the military is the adventure of a lifetime, for some it is a way to pay for college and for others there is a deep sense of patriotic duty. Among the many soldiers I have met, there have been right-wing Christian conservatives, poor people, Harvard-educated economic elites, left-leaning democrats, Buddhists, Muslims and environmentalists'.



Oh man, the work of New York based artist Inka Essenhigh is so good it makes my eyes water. [Read more](#)



Before MTV, MySpace, and viral marketing, album covers had the potential to make or break a band. First impressions count, and many a music geek have purchased albums on the cover artwork alone. So what **these guys** were thinking is simply beyond me. Although, if anyone has a spare copy of Devastating Dave the Turntable Slave then I know someone, ahem, who could take it off you. [Read more](#)

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Mecanoo Architects created this amazing house for the Nefkens family in the Wageningen municipality of the Netherlands. Man, why can't I be rich? Life is so unfair.

WE'RE WATCHING

There was a time, many moons ago, when I would only listen to bands off New Zealand's Flying Nun label. Yup, I would strap myself into a comfy chair, put my headphones



Tagged: photo essays, portraits

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on and, armed with a chunk of chocolate coated Peanut Slab and a can of L&P, soak up album after album of wonderfully self-indulgent low-fi melancholy. [Read more](#)

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Eik Ottosen, the hot Danish model has created Rubber Duck shoes. His Los Drillos come in just about every color and are super comfy and affordable. [Read more](#)



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WE'RE LISTENING TO



There's no shortage of bands channeling the surf rock and psych of the 1960s, but the Super Vacations' sloppy vocals, drunken guitar riffs, and blown out production give them a knowing swagger that has as much in common with Beat Happening and Thee Headcoats as with the Pyramids. They seem to take pride in how bad they are live, but their debut record shows a lot of potential.

WE'RE POSTING / SOME OF THE BEST



Mika
A little infectious lollipop rock anyone? Feel free to embarrass yourself singing along at the stoplight. If the other drivers give you that look, roll down the windows and spread the love.

YOU'RE SAYING (2)



Lotje said | 31 October, 2008

These pictures are fascinating and beautiful – a question: why are some of the girls wearing the headscarves – is that common among army women serving in Arab countries?



Claire Beckett said | 4 January, 2009

To my knowledge women serving in the United States military do not wear headscarves, they wear standard military uniforms. The women in my photographs wearing headscarves are role playing as Iraqi women during training exercises in the US. Some of the women are civilian actors and others are female military personnel. The purpose of the costumes is to make the training feel more realistic.

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