

# Feature Shoot

## Photographers on the rise

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## Claire Beckett, Boston

October 31, 2008 by [Alison Zavos](#)



[Claire Beckett](#) is a photographer based in Boston, MA. A native of Chicago, IL, she earned a BA in Anthropology from Kenyon College (Gambier, OH) in 2000 and an MFA in Photography from the Massachusetts College of Art (Boston, MA) in 2006. Claire Beckett is represented by the Carroll and Sons Gallery (formerly called the Bernard Toale Gallery) in Boston. Her photographs have been show in recent solo exhibitions at the Bernard Toale Gallery and at the University of Rhode Island, as well as in group exhibitions

at the Photographic Resource Center, Boston University and Simmons College. Claire Beckett is a 2007 recipient of the Massachusetts Cultural Council Artist Grant. From 2002-2004 she worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Republic of Benin, West Africa. Beckett is an Assistant Professor of Photography at the New England Institute of Art in Boston.

### *Interview*

#### **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 being necessary to protect soldiers), and at that time we weren’t being 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’.

‘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’.









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