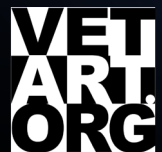


# BUILDING MENTAL WEALTH

Advocating the use of  
Deep Art Engagement  
as a means of achieving  
wellness within the  
Veteran Community





# Acknowledgements

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On behalf of our military service members, Veterans, family members, caregivers, stakeholders, and the generosity of the Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission (MHSOAC), we present this first report for a three-year support agreement.

This past year has been very successful, and we happily share our experiences with you and look forward to continuing our partnership.

Report created in 2021 by:  
Steven Dilley, VETART Executive Director  
Marilyn Huerta, VETART Veteran Communications Specialist



# Veterans Art Project

The Veterans Art Project offers free Ceramics, and Glass Casting Art classes to Veterans, Active duty, Spouses, and Caretakers. Community members are welcome to participate.

## Cultural Equity Statement

To support a full creative life for all, The Veterans Art Project aims to create a space that promotes cultural equity, supports all members and staff, and provides accessible facilities in which Veterans, family members, caregivers and active duty from ALL nationalities can create Dignified Displays of Art.



# Veterans Art Project

## Definition of Cultural Equity

Cultural equity embodies the values, policies, and practices that ensure all people – including but not limited to those who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion – are represented in the development of **VETART** programming; the support of Artists; the nurturing of accessible, thriving venues for expression; and the fair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources.







## Acknowledgements & Affirmations

In the United States, there are systems of power that grant privilege and access, unequally such that inequity and injustice result, and that must be continuously addressed and changed.

- Cultural equity is critical to the long-term viability of the Arts sector.
- We must hold ourselves accountable, because acknowledging and challenging our inequities and working in partnership is how we will make change happen.
- Everyone deserves equal access to a full, vibrant creative life, which is essential to a healthy and democratic society.
- The prominent presence of Artists challenges inequities and encourages alternatives.



### Modeling through Action

To provide informed, authentic leadership for cultural equity, we strive to...

- Pursue cultural consciousness throughout our organization through substantive learning and formal, transparent policies.
- Acknowledge and dismantle any inequities within our policies, systems, programs, and services, and report organization progress.
- Commit time and resources to expand more diverse leadership within our board, staff, and advisory bodies.



# BUILDING MENTAL WEALTH

Advocating the use of  
**Deep Art Engagement**  
as a means of achieving  
wellness within the  
**Veteran Community**

Who We  
Are

What is Deep  
Art  
Engagement?

Arts &  
Veterans

Arts &  
Public  
Health

Arts &  
Public  
Health  
Advocacy

Call to  
Action!





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About Deep Art Engagement (DAE)

Arts and Veterans

Arts and Public Health

Arts and Public Health Advocacy

Call to Action





# Who We Are

## The Veterans Art Project Team & Participants\*

- Veterans/Active Military
- Spouses and Children
- Registered Creative Therapists
- Behavioral Health Officials
- Public Health Professionals
- Caregivers
- Educators
- Culturally Aware Instructors
- Artists of all levels and experience
- Administrators (Stakeholders)
  - Veteran Administration (VA)
  - Veteran service Organizations
  - County Officials
  - City Officials
  - Statewide and National Officials
  - Legislators
  - Department of Defense (DOD)



\*And others interested in elevating the mental Health status of the veteran community (including care givers, friends and supporters) through innovative, creative methods.





# About Deep Arts Engagement

Former Second Lady of The United States, Karen Pence discussing Artwork with VETART participant Julio Villanuevo at VETART School of Ceramics and Glass.



# ABOUT: Deep Arts Engagements (DAE) are process-intensive arts encounters

The nature of process-intensive Arts encounters require continued engagement through multiple visits over time. For example, creating a ceramic mug requires the participant to learn to throw on the wheel, fire the piece in the kiln, glaze the piece, and then fire it again before they leave with their finished artwork. Practice based wellness.

DAEs can be any creative engagement that encourages an individual to keep returning in order to hone their skills, such as: ceramics, bronze-casting, glass-casting, wood-working, playing music, oil painting, etc.





# Deep Arts Engagement

DAE is a deep experience of mindfulness supporting individuals in not only creating Art, also helping to further create and develop their own expressive language.

Through the Arts, Veterans learn to express their emotions, thoughts, and feelings that may often come across incoherent or incomplete. This happens with access to a non-verbal means of communication. People learn to discern emotions by analyzing completed pieces.

“What have you done to my husband?” a spouse asks, “He used to never tell me anything and now that he’s participating at VETART, he is opening up to me and I’m now understanding his struggles and how we can help him better.”

The mechanism of how accessing visual language correlates to spoken language is not completely understood, remaining a fertile for area for investigation.



A photograph of two men in blue uniforms working on pottery in a workshop. The man in the foreground is wearing glasses and a green wristband, focused on shaping a piece of clay on a pottery wheel. The man in the background is also working on a pottery wheel. The workshop is filled with various pottery-related items, including a large white bowl and a wooden workbench. The text "Arts & Veterans" is overlaid on the image in a large, white, serif font.

# Arts & Veterans

# "Arts & Veterans"

10 Things Veterans Need to Know About Creative Arts

Discharging from the Military

Why Art for Our Veterans?

Bridging the Gap

The Veteran Ecosystem

Sharing, Creating and Service

Mental "Wealth"

Cal Berkeley Veterans Office Director Luis Jimenez celebrates with Veteran Artists from Cal-Berkeley after a successful VETART-MHSOAC pop-up Art Exhibit.







Veterans who create Art at **VETART** learn far more than just how to strengthen their creative skills, and their takeaways are far more than making a piece to decorate their home. Through Art, Veterans can express thoughts, feelings and emotions, and their community is educated about what a service member endures while in the military. Veterans learn how to adapt to life when transitioning to a civilian life. Veterans strengthen their creativity but also develop coping skills and learn to build resiliency.

Through Art, Veterans can express emotions, thoughts and feelings that may be, at the start, inchoate and incomplete. This happens through access to non-verbal means of expression through process and our collected visual language. People learn to discern emotions by analyzing completed pieces

Here is a list of reminders we stress to our veteran participants:

# 10 Things Veterans Need to Know About Creative Arts



The arts consist of, but not limited to, are music, art, dance, writing, poetry, theatre, photography, and other forms of creative expression.

The arts require observation, which helps us to better understand our world and our place in it.

Everyone is an artist in some way. You don't need any previous experience or formal training to engage in the arts.

Making, experiencing, and even appreciating art activates a pleasure center in the brain, which releases dopamine- a happiness hormone.

Creating art and music decreases stress and anxiety.

Engagement in the creative arts helps to express thoughts and ideas that are difficult to put into words.

Creative arts are social in nature and can provide an avenue to connect with families, friends and those close to you.

Making art and music requires focus and provides the opportunity to concentrate on something outside yourself.

You may find like-minded people in creative arts programs. You won't be alone.

The arts will help you more than you think. Not all arts are the same and many are unique. If you try one and it's not for you, entertain trying another.





Scott Hickey VETART foundry manager and Reginald Green VETART Instructor man the display booth at DAV National Convention in New Orleans.

# Discharging from Military Service

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When a Veteran transitions from a life in the military to one of a civilian, they may experience an array of mixed emotions. Some of emotions are, but not limited to:

- Anxiety
- Frustration
- Fear
- Loss of identity
- Impatience
- Questioning their meaning and purpose

Veterans also struggle socially when they leave the military. Some of these struggles include:

- Translating military experience to civilian job qualifications
- Finding and sustaining gainful employment
- Attending college
- Securing housing
- Attending to daily responsibilities such as managing finances
- Feeling a sense of belonging with others, even family members and friends

The experience of “Participation Avoidance”, or the tendency to avoid social engagements, can lead to negative health outcomes associated with isolation.



# Discharging from Military Service

## Isolation

- Veterans' experiences of social disconnections are particularly concerning given the fact social support is a key factor in successful transition" (Caplin & Lewis, 2011) and serves as a preventive factor against suicide (Pietrak et al., 2010)
- McDonald (2015) reported that 17 of the 22 U.S. Veterans who take their own lives each day were found to have been disconnected from family and friends and were not receiving supportive services (DeLucia, 2016).

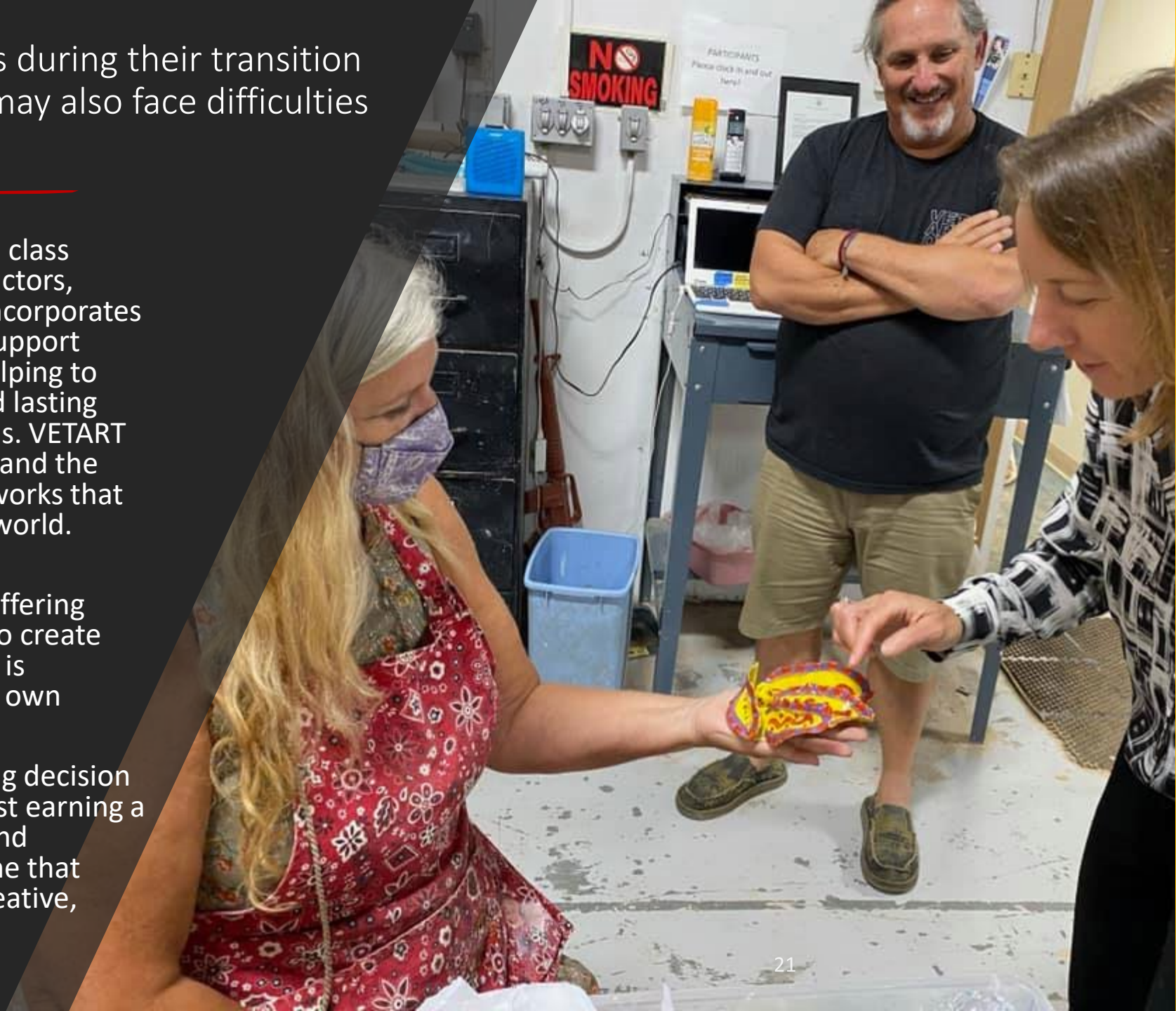
Marine Artist Colin Hoffman displays Artwork he created. Figures created using resin epoxy clay.





As Veterans experience challenges during their transition into civilian life, support systems may also face difficulties during this transition.

- **Family and Caregivers-** By offering world class facilities and culturally competent instructors, many with advanced degrees. VETART incorporates Artists into the Veterans ecosystem of support including caregivers, family members helping to create new narratives of community and lasting bonds that strengthen social connections. VETART is committed to the support of creation and the dignified display of Veteran created Artworks that express their individual outlook on this world.
- **Skill Bridge-** DOD Partnership is vital in offering transitioning Veterans the opportunity to create their own new story in community. That is supportive and challenging to find one's own unique soul pathway and connection.
- **Reverse Mentorship-** advocacy, Educating decision makers that there is more to life than just earning a living. VETART believes that education and creativity is an inherent human right. One that leads to wellness in many forms be it creative, cultural, social and economically.





# Why Art for our Veterans?

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“As much as storytelling is therapeutic and embedded in our culture, the making of Art is also a tool that helps us cope and build resiliency. It has been introduced to many populations that suffer from PTSD symptoms, and it shows that art is a coping mechanism and incorporates time for reflection, expression and storytelling as well. Art therapy has been researched in populations,” (Huerta, 2020).

Art making supports Veterans in dealing with their emotions in struggling with issues: homelessness, hunger, grief, loss of identity, securing a new career, financial burdens, seeking education, connecting to others, finding a purpose, feeling isolated or having thoughts of suicide.

Diving into Deep Art Engagement enables our Veterans to cope, express, and define their language to communicate what they are struggling with and in turn seek help and resources. The Arts open a pathway to connect and to communicate.





## Bridging the Gap

Individuals can engage in the Arts to navigate difficult, yet necessary to express emotions. The Arts also establish a connection to a community. The process of making and sharing Art helps the community recognize rather than repress the reality of war, opening a path to healing collective trauma. When civilians and Veterans confront the realities of war together, a new possibility emerges: **“stronger ties among veterans and civilians who have come together to heal.”** (DeLucia 2016).

## Challenges for the Individual and the Community

Access to an Art making facility is critical for our Veterans. Many do not have space to create or Art supplies. **VETART** provides a studio for all participants. The large indoor space offers materials and equipment such as clay, throwing wheels, and kilns that Veterans could not afford on their own. Participants gather regularly in the studio to make Art, share, and connect with others who understand their struggles, the value of making Art and the power of the process practiced in community.

## Utilizing the Arts to Be Well

The Art making process allows participants to find the means to express themselves when they cannot find the words to tell their stories or explain how they feel. Participants put their emotions into the Art pieces and learn to communicate via the Arts. This process is a tool that helps them connect with others, communicate their emotions and experiences, cope with their struggles, and build resiliency. The process of making Art leads to wellness and the bridge to wellness is constructed through Artistic practice.



# The Veteran Ecosystem

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The Veteran Ecosystem consists of spouses, dependents, family members, friends, caregivers, employers, and our communities.

*“Health issues also often affect the Veteran support system,” (RAND Corporation, 2019), and other members within their ecosystem.”*

- Communities can aid in the healing process by acknowledging the impact the wounds from war have on Veterans, as well as the general population.
- Acknowledgement can begin through the Arts and Art therapy, and participation on the macro level may help communities and society acknowledge that wounds exist.
- “Rituals such as the making, sharing, and viewing of artwork can support a collective process that, in turn, can help expose and possibly heal the multiple wounds of war” (DeLucia, 2016).



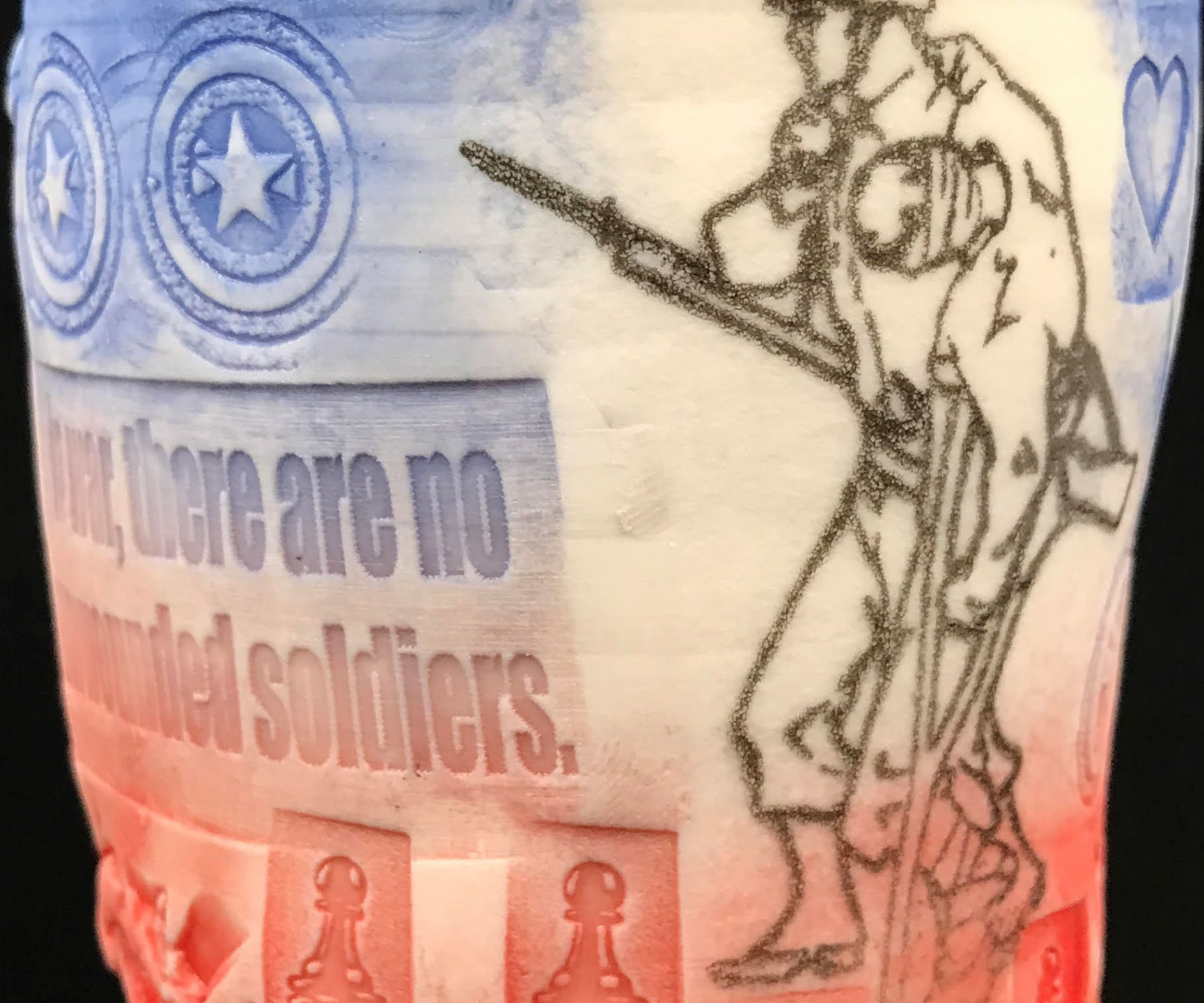


Colin Hoffman, Veteran Artist

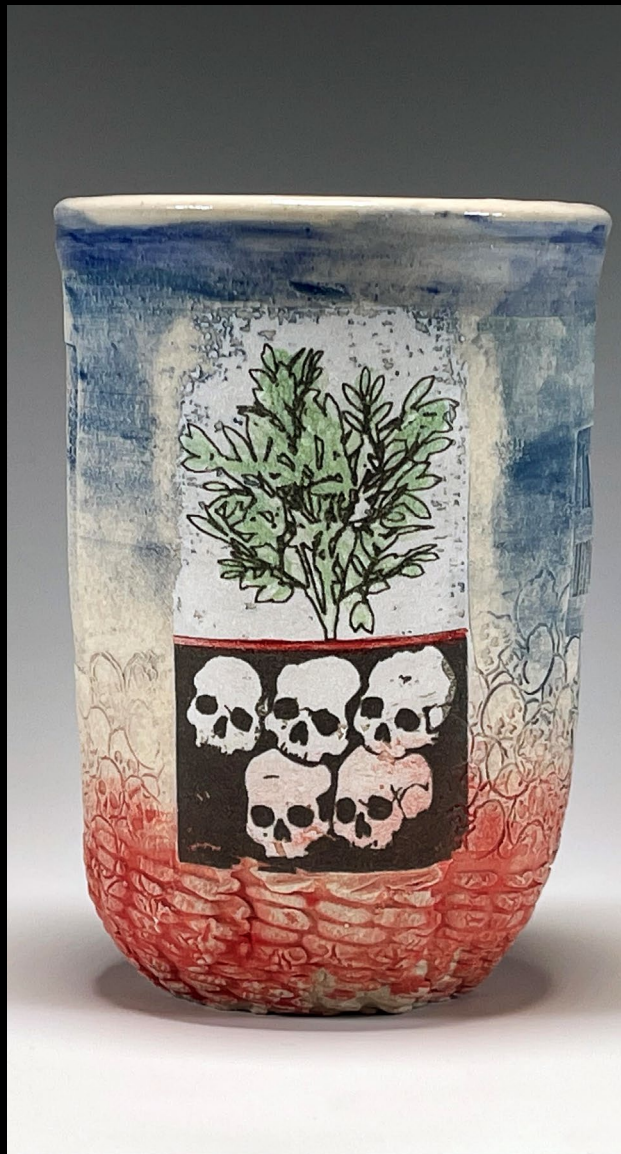


*"Creating, without ego or judgment,  
is the key to mental freedom."*  
Colin Hoffman, Veteran Artist

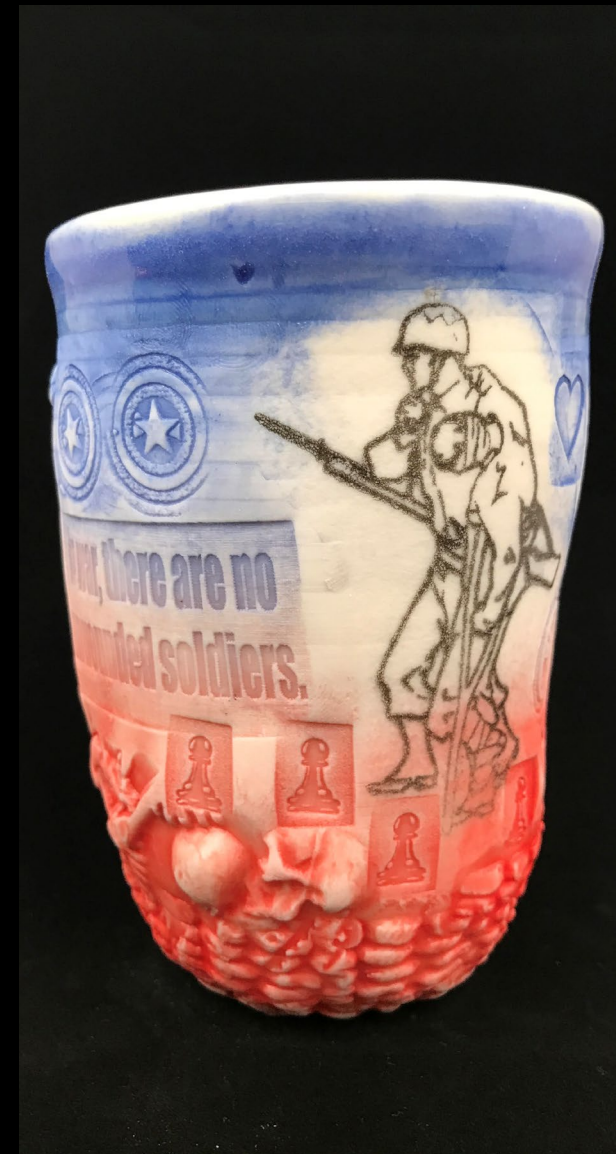








*"I wanted to take part in VETART events because I wanted to help other Vets. In these last few years, I have watched, in horror, as the Veteran community has become more divided. Taking part in these events has been really rewarding and I believe useful. I can't say my politics is the same as all of the Vets we work with but I think we all share a respect for each other and our service. I think many of us are struggling with isolation and depression. Making Art and the community of Artists has truly saved my life. I have to admit it wasn't until I started talking and working with other Vets, I realized how much I had missed this unique community. I served with folks from many different communities. The closest I have come to the lived experience of a "melting pot" or a "meritocracy" was my time in the Marines. Through VETART I have connected with Vets 20 years older than me and 20 years younger. There is an almost immediate connection once we start working together. I believe if we can connect Vets to each other and the diverse communities they come from we can do great things not just for Vets but all Americans. The idea of "post traumatic growth" has become a new mantra for me. We can not go back to the people we were before our wars, but we can go forward to a better place. We can use our trauma to grow."*  
Ehren Tool, Veteran Artist







Ehren Tool,  
USMC Veteran

*Post Traumatic Growth*  
2021  
Ceramic

# Sharing, Creating AND Teaching

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Sharing, Creating, AND Teaching creative expression through the Arts supports emotional well-being for both the individual and the community.

Here we list a few of those methods :

**SHARING** - At the Veterans Art Project, participants have an opportunity to join fellow Veterans and embrace a new skills they may not have experienced before. Art making provides a project to focus on that requires no previous skills and makers are not judged by the the outcome. Veterans who make Art, investigate, explore, and discover more about themselves than one may realize. Art is created, the process is reflected on, and then talked about. Participants discuss their artworks and what it means to them, but they also have an opportunity to exhibit their final Art pieces at dignified exhibitions and forums. These exhibits educate viewers, and more importantly, Veterans find a sense of pride and belonging. Some examples of sharing include but not limited to are:

- See one, do one, teach one! Learn how to make Art, then share it, and then teach it to others.
- Making Art in the studio and talking with peers about what was created and how the process in which it was made.
- Participate in online exhibits- opportunity to speak with guests who virtually attend and talk about the art experience.
- Attend and showcase art pieces at open forums, in Art galleries, or at **VETART** Pop-Up Exhibitions located in high profile locations across the state. These exhibits are hosted both at indoor and outdoor locations.



## SHARING:

A dignified display of Art presents Veteran-made creative work with respect and sensitivity for unique experience and **VETART** aims to provide professional high-quality opportunities for participants to exhibit their pieces.

“As exhibiting Artists, Veterans self-advocate and inform the public of their experiences, and in the process externalize and take ownership of their own perspective.”

Gallery exhibits “become active and active art intervention for **decreasing isolation, combating stigma and marginalization, and reducing disconnection between Veterans and the civilian community**” (DeLucia, 2016).

Left to right; Brigadier General Dave Brahms, and Artist Reginald Green, 3rd Annual Veterans Exhibition 2021, Photo Courtesy of San Diequito Engineering

“I have to credit the long waits at the VA, where I would do all the pen and ink on the first layer of the acrylic. I have a portable pen and ink set wherever I go, and when it is the VA, DMV, and or waiting for a flight boarding at the airport, pen and ink is my calm and meditative process of creating.” – Amanda Saint Claire, Veteran Artist







Nichola Guerra, Veteran Artist



Rebecca Berkenpas, Veteran Artist







## Sharing, Creating, AND Teaching

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**CREATING** - “Mental Wealth” Opportunities to flourish making Art supports well-being and mental health vital to Veterans and peers. By utilizing resources that help one to live a healthy life, everyone wins. Currently, many resources consist of activities such as fitness, sports and recreation. Making Art provides an outlet for emotions, frustrations, and expression to define, discover and document. Examples include:

- Throwing on a pottery wheel
- Hand-building Art works made of clay
- Glass blowing Art projects
- Participating in classes and/or workshops
- Creating Art during “open Art studio” hours
- Exploring new media
- Self-discovery through creating

## Sharing, Creating AND Teaching

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### **TEACHING** - Service After Service:

Some Veterans experiencing effects from PTS or seeking purpose after serving in the military are not so sure what their next professional steps will be.

At **VETART**, Veterans learn to create Art for themselves but also have an opportunity to teach their fellow Veterans how to make Art and how this process supports their mental health. These experiences are wealth to them and the more they participate in the process, the more they want to create, to teach and to share how much this helps them.

See one, do one, teach one! Learn how to make Art , then share it, then teach it to others.





## Service After Service:

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For many Veterans engaged in creative outlets, being a service to a community through the Arts provides a deeper sense of connection and fulfillment, but integral to their own healing journey.

*“Service After Service to me has meant reclaiming my identity as a Veteran and through that process finding my true purpose...service to others is a key part of my mental health and an undeniable part of my process as an artist. I am still an advocate, but no longer Judge Advocate General. I am an advocate for the healing power of the Arts, spiritual well being, the power of aesthetics and the Arts to bring about lasting change and as a mode of problem solving, and as a voice for those who are unable to speak for themselves.”*

– Amanda Saint Claire, Veteran Artist & Instructor





**Service After Service** can appear in various forms, be it mentorship, class facilitation, sharing work, playing music, and other forms of creative management. Veteran Artist, Phyllis Thomas hosts “Paint & Sips” art workshops for fellow Veterans in her Los Angeles based community.

*“Here are some funny things... the VA appointments and waiting areas are often long waits for great doctors; thus, I do detailed-pen and ink work, which is how this project was started.”*  
- Veteran Artist, Phyllis Thomas



# Mental “Wealth” Arts Practice encourages;

## DECREASES

- Isolation
- Anger
- Stress (Post Traumatic Stress)
- Anxiety
- Depression

## INCREASES

- Socialization
- Sense of Connectiveness
- Community Resiliency
- Regulation of Stress Hormone (Cortisol)
- Releases “feel-good” hormones such as Endorphins

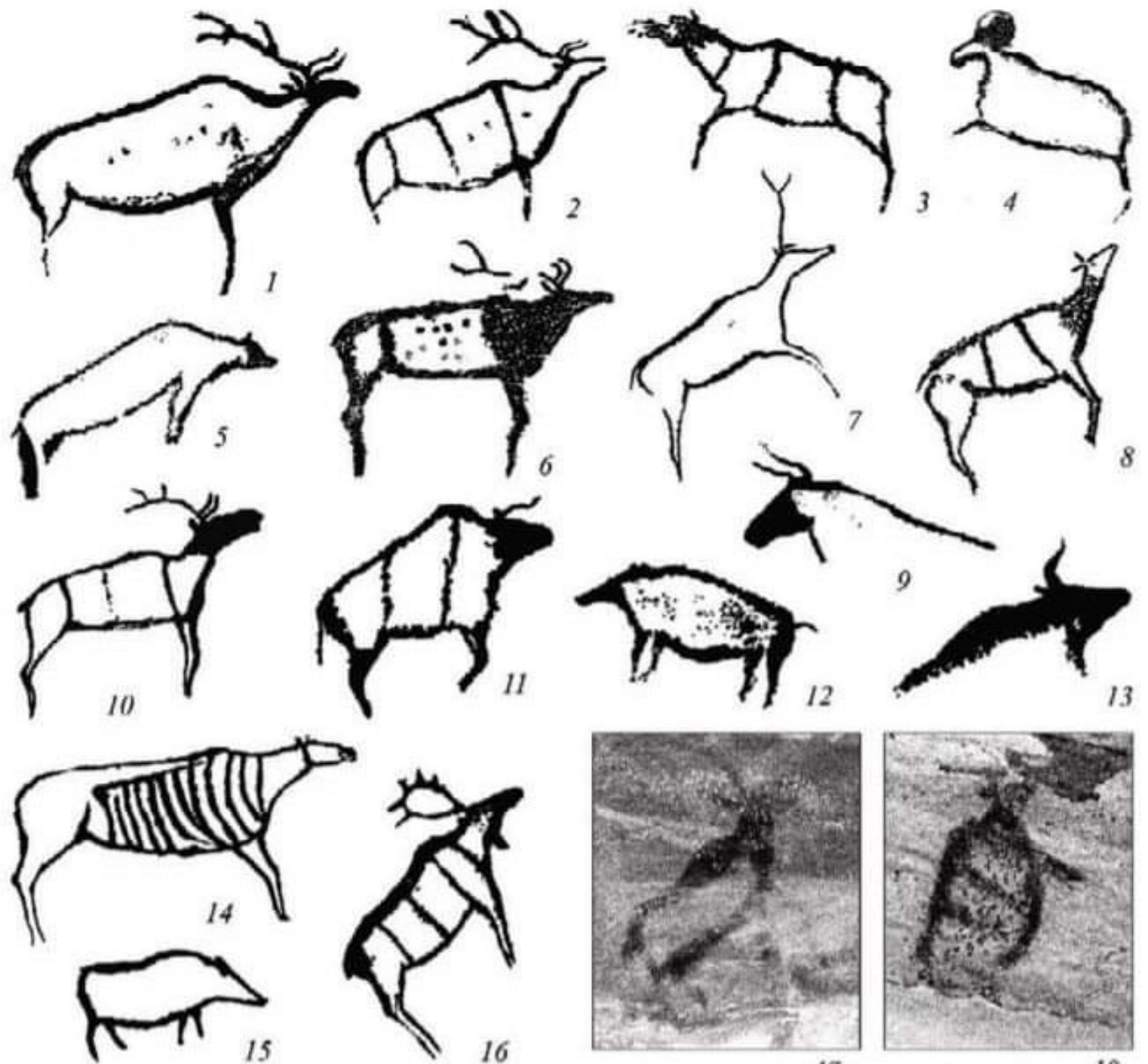
Participation in community Arts program is not only useful in maintaining mental health but creates conditions for flourishing emotionally. Being engaged in an experience that not only feels good but is meaningful. Creative outlets not only help manage the pain of emotional and physical wounds but create mental “wealth”.

This mental wealth supports social emotional learning and provides a better access to language. Creating art is one means of practice that bridges the chasm to wellness.



“I like seeing other people heal and get a creative outlet. When I help other Veterans sculpt and cast their own faces, I see them glow and it’s very fulfilling for me – being able to help other Veterans and create art, it’s the best of both worlds,” says Reginald Green, VETART Instructor. (Reginald also utilizes his art practice to manage migraines.)

# Arts & Public Health





# Arts & Public Health

How the Arts Help the Public Health Sector

What THE ARTS are Doing for Public Health

Artists as Second Responders

PTSD & Suicide Awareness

Detail image ;Veteran Jesse Albrecht is a national leader of incorporating Veteran themes into the ceramic medium.

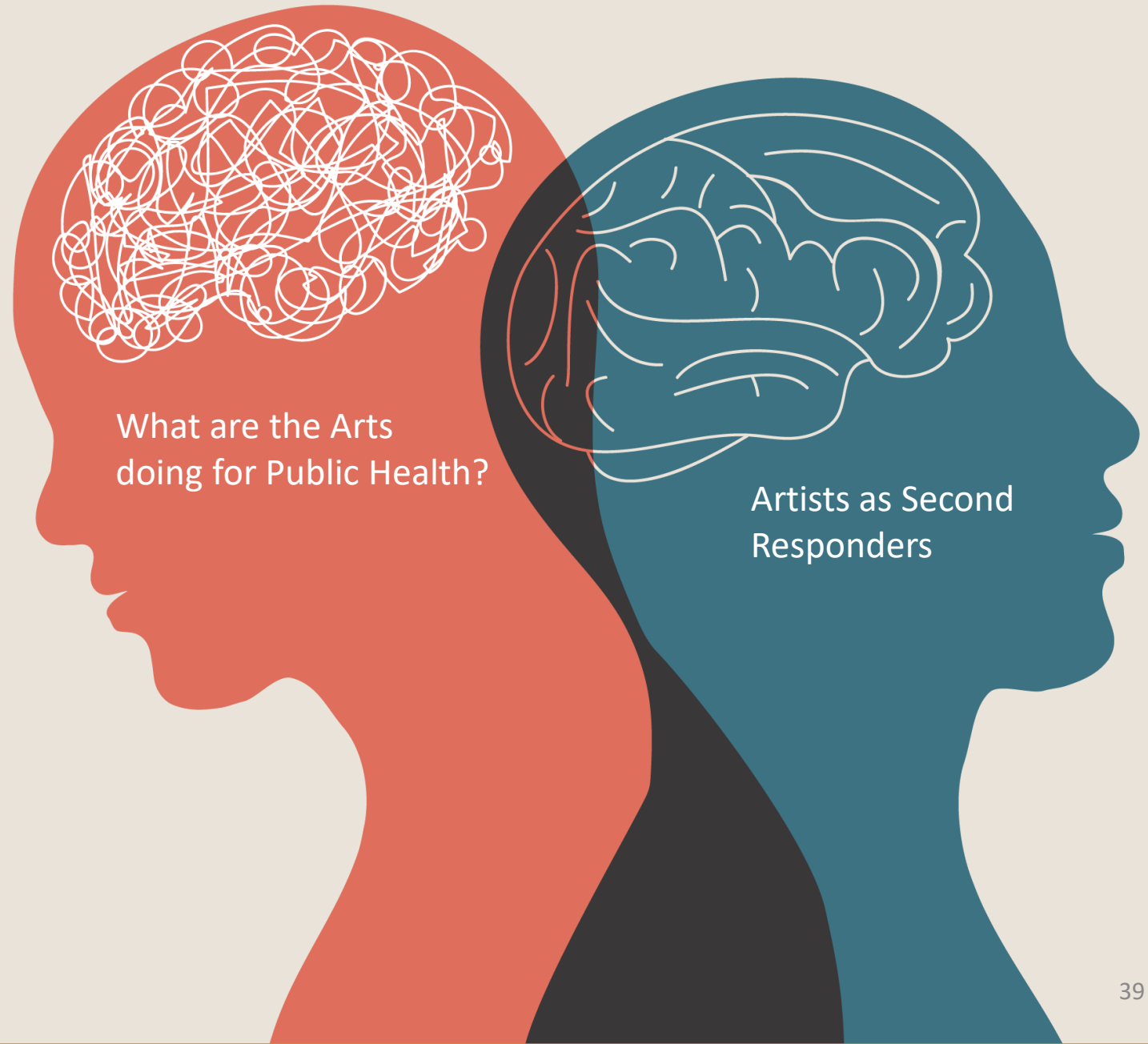


## How the Arts Help the Public Health Sector

The Arts provide ways to form critical meaning and culture, to critique and reveal, and is a valuable asset in sparking systemic change within our healthcare system, to create a more just, equitable, and responsive experience for all.

VetArt proposes utilizing the skills of Artists for crisis response, framing Artists' as second responders.

“Both Artists in Health Care and Art Therapists agree that the Arts enhance quality of living for individuals and communities alike” (Van Lilith et. al, 2018).





# What THE ARTS are Doing for Public Health

- **CONNECT SERVICES:** When health and social services are physically integrated with Arts and culture practice spaces, access to services can be increased.
- **FACILITATE DIALOGUE:** The safety and sense of connection created in the Arts and cultural activities and spaces facilitates dialogue, even about difficult issues and across difference. This dialogue can reduce stigma and isolation and increase access to care.
- **IMPROVE HEALTH COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION EFFORTS:** Arts-based modes of communication make information clearer and more accessible, memorable and shareable.
- **ADVANCE COMMUNITY-LED, GENERATED, AND SUSTAINED HEALTH PRACTICES:** Because every community possesses Arts and cultural assets, integration of Arts and culture into health promotion can translate to sustainable community-led efforts and new social norms.

Sonke, J., Golden, T., Francois, S., Hand, J., Chandra, A., Clemmons, L., Fakunle, D., Jackson, M.R., Magsamen, S., Rubin, V., Sams, K., Springs, S. (2019). Creating Healthy Communities through Cross-Sector Collaboration (White Paper). University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine/ArtPlace America.



Veteran, Dick Erickson 95 years young. He visited **VETART** to help pour bronze. He had just completed his honor flight to DC. Dec. 2021



## What THE ARTS are Doing for Public Health

- **MAKE ORDINARY MOMENTS EXTRAORDINARY, NOTABLE, AND MEMORABLE:** Aesthetic experiences are fundamental to human meaning- making and identity formation. They can shift perspectives and can generate shared meanings that motivate and transform individual and collective behaviors.
- **PROVIDE DIRECT HEALTH BENEFITS:** Many Arts and culture-based strategies offer direct and immediate health benefits, such as increased physical activity, stress reduction and connection. Building fine motor skills.
- **INCREASED PARTICIPATION:** Arts and cultural generate widespread interest, and they can be fun. Thus, they can optimize health program reach and participation.
- **ORGANIZE AND MOBILIZE:** As Arts and culture blends into new media, and as technology increases the reach and diversity of ideas, Arts and culture help people connect, mobilize, and organize for change in new ways and at unprecedented speeds.

Sonke, J., Golden, T., Francois, S., Hand, J., Chandra, A., Clemmons, L., Fakunle, D., Jackson, M.R., Magsamen, S., Rubin, V., Sams, K., Springs, S. (2019). Creating Healthy Communities through Cross-Sector Collaboration (White Paper). University of Florida at Center for Arts in Medicine/ArtPlace America.



# Artists as Second Responders

While first responders take care of a person's physical needs in crisis, a second responder provides means to tend to emotional well-being after a crisis.

Artists act as Second Responders after a crisis in that they help individuals and communities, express difficult topics and emotions that cause harm when ignored.

When Artists function as Second Responders for promoting emotional health in public health's continuum of care, and are incorporated as such, both physical and emotional needs can be met, creating more holistically healthy populations.

- Second responders introduce Arts as a means of working through trauma, including emergencies and national disasters around the nation.
- Second responders provide space, materials and the opportunities for victims to create and process through Deep Art Engagement so they can work through their emotions, stress and loss. It is a means of coping, adapting and building resiliency to mental wealth and survival.
- During times of grief and loss, providing these opportunities help victims find meaning and purpose.
- It is important for City, County and National Stakeholders to introduce and propose these options to those in need.
- Advocacy for these opportunities to include state and FEMA's resources is vital.

*"During a crisis, the arts remind us that we are human and validate our experience."  
(Van Lith, et. Al 2018).*



# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness

PTSD is classified as an anxiety disorder and arises from exposure to traumatic events when people feel they would be hurt, or they are afraid of dying (APA 1994). Intense distress due to PTSD can be diagnosed in Veterans who experience nightmares, flashbacks, anger, anxiety, insomnia, “and a profound sense of morbid sadness” (Caddick, Smith & Phoenix 2015: 1). We see patterns in these symptoms due to experiencing traumatic events, stress caused by horrific situations, or a feeling of helplessness. Three main symptom groups of PTSDs are known as re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyper-arousal (Wall 2012).

- Re-experiencing symptoms may exist when someone feels as though they are reliving traumatic situations
- Another main symptom of PTSD is when avoidance symptoms occur when people try to evade from their feelings or thought or they evade from people or places that remind them about the traumatic events that trouble them. They may feel emotionally numb and avoid any participation in daily activities which explains why it’s important to help them reconnect with others (Wall 2012). Feeling detached from others leads to a loss of the ability to feel happiness. As a result, they foresee a bleak future for themselves (NCD 2019).
- The third symptom of PTSD is known as hyper-arousal symptoms. It takes place when the person experiences insomnia or have trouble staying asleep. They get agitated, angry or are more irritable than usual. Hyper-vigilance and exaggerated startle reflex can also be present meaning they are jumpy or act paranoid. They are anxious, lack concentration and sense danger around them all the times (Huerta, 2020).

*Huerta, Marilyn. The Power of Veteran Storytelling & Art, 2020.*



Colin Hoffman, Veteran Artist



## Suicide Awareness

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- According to Veteran Affairs, 17-20 Veterans commit suicide every day (VA 2019) and one suicide is far too many.
- “Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S.,” Terri Tanielian, Senior Behavioral Scientist former director of the RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research, stated before the House Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security on May 8, 2019 (Tanielian 2019).
- Since 2005, the rate of military suicides compared to civilian suicides has not gone unnoticed and the number is remarkably high with no sign of decreasing (USA Today 2019).
- According to the VA's 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, between 2008-2017 veteran suicides exceeded 6,000 each year, which is more than the total number of combat deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan combined. In this past decade, this shocking number is also higher than the total number of American lives we lost to the Vietnam War (Tanielian 2019).

*Huerta, Marilyn. The Power of Veteran Storytelling & Art, 2020.*







# Arts & Advocacy



## Arts & Advocacy

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Pop-Up Café Events (Virtual & In-Person)  
MHSOAC

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Our Network/Our Partners

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Advocacy Goals

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Deliverables







# The Pop-up Community Creative Arts Cafés

The Pop-Up Café is a statewide, creative Arts engagement event with an emphasis on mental health and wellness for Veterans, Active-Duty, family members, caregivers, and community members. Events are made possible by the Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission.



# POP-UP COMMUNITY CREATIVE ARTS CAFÉ

**VET  
ART  
ORG**



**STATEWIDE EVENT**

**MHSOAC**  
Mental Health Services  
Oversight & Accountability Commission

In collaborating with local communities across the state of California to produce the Pop-Up Cafés, **VETART** and a series of local partners introduce both professional Artists and the mental health resources available to our Veteran community. Event attendees hear directly from the Artists about the process of Art-making and the ways the Arts have directly improved their health, sense of community and belonging, restored a connection to having hope and purpose, and to find a means of expression as part of their healing journey.

*The Pop-Up Cafés are designed to engage, create dialogue, foster networking, and to speak directly to the unique experiences and mental health challenges of the extended Veteran community in these challenging times.*

## Virtual Pop-ups Cafés in 2020-2021

The Covid19 pandemic affected many people across the world and our U.S. Veterans and military affiliated members were no exception. They too, were impacted by being isolated in their homes and being disconnected from their families, comrades and support systems. Businesses and mental health non-profits were closed across the nation and unemployment rates, hospitalizations and death rates skyrocketed.

Providing Art making resources to our Veterans was imperative- VETART provided Art supplies to participants for home use but also hosted virtual Pop-Up Cafés that enabled Veterans to continue staying connected with others with as a means for making Art, reflecting and sharing about their experiences.

They still had a voice to connect and advocate.

Exekias' *Ajax and Achilles Playing a Game* that depicts two great Greek heroes from Homer's *Iliad*.





## Virtual Pop-ups Cafés in 2020-2021



**VETART** curated and presented several interactive virtual events featuring California Artists who have served in the United States Armed Forces alongside presentations from Art and music therapists who work within the community.

As part of the event, an *Invocation and Land Acknowledgement* was offered, and a *Listening Session* was moderated.

Participating attendees had the opportunity to hear directly from the Artists about the process of Art-making and the ways the Arts have directly improved their health, gave them a sense of community and belonging, restored a connection, gave them hope and purpose, and helped them to find a means of expression as part of their healing journey.

In collaborating with local communities across the state of California and in producing the Pop-Up Cafés, The Veterans Art Project (**VETART**) and a series of local partners introduced others to mental health resources and services to our Veteran and military-affiliated community.

# Virtual Pop-ups Cafés 2020-2021

Veteran Artists and participants in our Virtual events included the following:

**Darron Devillez**

Opening Remarks

**Ivan Sam**

Leads & Land Acknowledgement

**Brian Shul**

Nature Photographer

**Bert Johnson**

Musician, Painter & Vietnam War Veteran

**Chris Thompson**

Pottery Wheel Throw Demos

**Amanda Saint Claire**

Painting & Healing

**Luis Gonzales**

Digital Illustrator & Fine Artist

**Tonya Savice**

Veteran Artist – Your Best is Yet to Come!



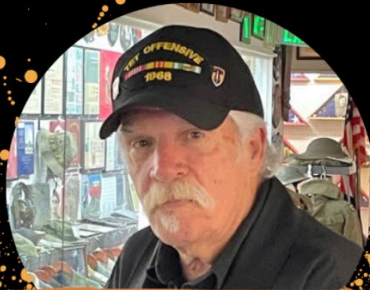
Opening Remarks with  
Darron Devillez



Ivan Sam  
Leads a Land Acknowledgement



Brian Shul  
Nature Photographer



Bert Johnson  
Musician, Painter, and Vietnam War Veteran



Chris Thompson  
On the Wheel



Amanda Saint Claire  
on Painting and Healing



Luis Gonzales  
Digital Illustrator and Fine Artist



Tonya Savice  
YOUR BEST IS YET TO COME!



Chris Thompson  
On the Wheel



# Virtual Pop-ups Cafés 2020-2021

Veteran Artists and participants in our Virtual events included the following:

**Jill Brenegan**  
Art Therapists

**Phylis Thomas**  
Veteran Artist/Painter

**Aaron Burks**  
Portraitist & Maritime Scene Painter

**Cory Woodrow**  
Drumming Circle & Musician Therapist, MT-BC

**Darron Devillez**  
Closing Remarks



Art Therapist Jill Brenegan  
Health and Wellness Interview



Painter Phyllis Thomas  
and Her Soaring Spirits



Aaron Burks  
Portraitist and Maritime Scene Painter



Darron Devillez  
on his Mental Health Journey



Cory Woodrow: Drumming Circle  
Music Therapist, MT-BC



Closing Remarks with  
Darron Devillez

To listen to our virtual interviews or lessons, please visit: [www.vetart.org](http://www.vetart.org)  
First year partners included the following; Oceanside Museum of Art, Monca, Museum of Northern California Art, Yuba-Sutter Arts and Culture, Cal-Berkeley Veterans Center.



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# In-Person, Live Pop-Up Café Visalia, CA December 2021

Veterans were thrilled to get back to exhibiting and sharing a wide-range of Artworks they created during the past year. Adrenaline was pumping as Veteran Ivan Sam participated in a drumming circle with fellow Vets. Veteran Artist, Colin Hoffman exhibited and spoke about his sculptural Art pieces created using sculpey clay and spray cans and says that his Art is “like air” to him.

Phyllis Thomas, Veteran Artist showcased both her paintings and shoes that she paints.

Tonya Savice, Veteran Artist, was excited to exhibit her clay pieces and one her favorite pieces is her face mask. There is so much meaning to her artwork and it's personal for her as she shares her stories with others. One of the masks she created represents freedom for her and she says, it means that it frees her from the stigma that is associated with Military Sexual Trauma (MST) she experienced in the service.

More Pop-Up Cafés are already scheduled for 2022 and Veteran Artists who participated in The Veterans Art Project are excited to exhibit more works and plan to continue telling their stories.



Shoes painted and exhibited by  
Phyllis Thomas, Veteran Artist



“People have told me that I’ve inspired them to create more.”  
Colin Hoffman, Veteran Artist



# The Event Schedule

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- Virtual Pop-Up Cafés were produced during the 2020-2021 Covid19 pandemic
- In-Person Pop-Up Café took place in Visalia, CA on Dec. 11, 2021
- Pop-Up Cafés are scheduled in 2022 as follows:
  - Shasta, CA
  - Los Angeles, CA
  - San Jose, TBA
  - Riverside, CA
  - Sacramento, CA

Veteran Artist Pedro Martinez with his Grandson.





# Our Network

With each local event, local agencies, service providers, non-profits and Veterans groups are encouraged to connect with another and to explore how the Arts can be promoted within their immediate communities. The Pop-Up Cafés are designed to engage dialogue, foster networking and to speak directly to the unique experiences and mental health challenges of the extended Veteran community in these challenging times.

- VETERANS
- ACTIVE MILITARY
- MILITARY AFFILIATED MEMBERS
- MILITARY SPOUSES, CHILDREN, FAMILY
- CAREGIVERS
- HEALTH PROVIDERS
- ARTISTS
- THERAPISTS
- COUNSELORS
- EDUCATORS
- LEGISLATORS
- COUNTY OFFICIALS
- COMMUNITY MEMBERS

# Our Partners

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES  
OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION (MHSOAC)

NEIGHBORHOOD REINVESTMENT PROGRAM  
SAN DIEGO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

NEA-CREATIVE FORCES

VETERANS MUSEUM OF SAN DIEGO

OCEANSIDE MUSEUM OF ART

CALIFORNIA ARTS COUNCIL

YUBA SUTTER ARTS & CULTURE

RESOUNDING JOY

MONCA-MUSEUM OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA ART

ASPIRE CENTER, SAN DIEGO

USC ART GALLERY: INSTITUTE FOR GENETIC MEDICINE



# Advocacy Goals

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VETART's Pop-Up Cafés are part of a statewide campaign, sponsored by, and in collaboration with, the California's Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission (MHSOAC), with the overarching Arts advocacy goal of generating awareness of the critical role the Arts play in benefiting the mental wellness of Veterans and their supporters.

Locations of these opportunities are vital to Veteran participants and to those who are educated about our military population.





# Deliverables

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The results of the Pop-Up Cafés is delivered to the Behavioral Health Services of the county where the event take place as well as the

- Board of Supervisors
- State and Federal Representatives and Senators
- The Governor
- Art Boards
- The Press
- Others including post secondary educational entities, Veteran service agencies, Veteran service officers and Certifying officials.



# Call to Action



## Call to Action

Next Steps for The Veteran Art Project

Documentary Storytelling

First Steps for Decision- Makers

Contacts & Appreciation



# Next Steps for The Veteran Art Project

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More Pop-up Cafes  
Scheduled for California

Broadening outreach and  
connecting with more  
Veterans

Adding more Art forms  
such as photography,  
spoken word, written  
literature, and visual Arts

Documentary video  
production

Due to budget constraints,  
Fallbrook Foundry VETART  
location has closed;  
Seeking more funding to provide  
bronze/casting Art services





# Documentary Storytelling

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# KOCT Producing Vet Art Video

In December of 2021, the KOCT Team visited the VetArt School of Ceramics and Glass in Vista, California and began filming just some of the amazing stories told by Veteran Artists who participate in The Veterans Art Project. This documentary video will be airing in early January 2022, so be a part of our journey as we help you understand how vital it is to instill creativity in the lives of our military population. [https://youtu.be/IVL4YKYK\\_Yk](https://youtu.be/IVL4YKYK_Yk)







James Lepanto Health Services  
Advisory Board, County of San Diego  
Board of Supervisors Appointee, Chair  
Steve Dilley Executive Director VETART  
receives first ever San Diego County  
Behavioral Health Services award 2020.

# First Steps for Decision- Makers

Utilize the steps outlined here to support the Arts role in innovating mental health interventions. While our programming is geared toward the Veteran community, these steps are applicable to whole communities.

[Come and visit us and learn how you can support!](#)

## [Get to know local Arts and cultural assets.](#)

Initiate discovery meetings with local or regional Arts councils, local arts organizations, artists, and community culture barriers. Plan to listen and learn and discuss shared issues and goals.

## [Co-locate health and social services with arts and cultural activity.](#)

Integrating arts programming into existing community centers or health clinics can increase access and engagement and create immediate improvements in health outcomes. For example, **VETART** conducts outreach Art classes at the La Jolla VA.



# First Steps for Decision- Makers

## Support local grassroots efforts.

Identify and elevate the work being undertaken by local Artists and culture bearers. Establish equitable and reciprocal relationships, and consider how sponsorship, partnership, or other public health resources could support existing community-led initiatives and lead to deeper collaboration. Expanding of the Arts for use in public health.

## Reverse Mentorship

When done correctly, reverse mentoring has been promoted as a powerful tool for building relationships that further diversity and inclusion.

## Partner with local Artists and Arts organizations on the design and implementation of interventions.

Community-based Arts organizations and Artists can drive program innovation, access, and participation. They can also help you build community relationships and communicate in personally and culturally relevant ways for your programs. Artists and Arts practice can also increase the inclusivity and cultural responsiveness of conventional approaches to health interventions and research.





## Connect with our Veterans. Connect with us.

For a deeper understanding of integrating  
the Arts and Mental Health or to schedule  
a consultation, please contact us:

[www.vetart.org](http://www.vetart.org)

[info@vetart.org](mailto:info@vetart.org)

2422 Cades Way, Vista CA 92081

Follow us on social media:

Twitter [@vetarts](https://twitter.com/vetarts)

Facebook [@vetart.org](https://www.facebook.com/vetart.org)

Instagram [@vetartorg](https://www.instagram.com/vetartorg)

*Changing lives through Art,  
Creating Mental Wealth.*

**VET  
ART.  
ORG**



# A special thank you to our sponsor and all of our collaborating partners :

## SPONSOR:


**Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission (MHSOAC)**

## Collaborating Partners:

- USS IOWA
- Art Hell
- Aspire Center and Diego
- Cal Veterans Service Center, Berkeley University of California
- California Arts Council
- Creative Forces
- Resounding Joy
- Museum of Northern California Arts (MONCA)
- National Endowment for the Arts: Creative Forces
- Oceanside Museum of Art
- San Diego Board of Supervisors
- USC Art Gallery: Institute for Genetic Medicine
- Veterans Museum of San Diego
- Yuba Sutter Arts & Culture







We especially thank  
our network,  
participants, and  
VETART Team:

- Veterans
- Active Military
- Military Affiliated Members
- Military Spouses, Children and Family
- Caregivers
- Health Providers
- Artists
- Therapists
- Counselors
- Educators
- Legislators
- City, Council and National Representatives
- Friends and Community Members

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View California State legislation regarding Veterans and Mental Health [here](#)



VETART Instructor, Participant and volunteer Nichola Guerra discusses his completed pieces.