



PEACE GLOVES & WAR

TEXT BY ANNA ARMAS
PHOTOS BY NEAL HOWARD

IT BEGAN INNOCENTLY
ENOUGH, UPON SIFTING
THROUGH HER RECENTLY
DECEASED MOTHER'S MOST
PRIZED POSSESSIONS.
NOW, MORE THAN A DECADE
LATER, CECELIA KANE AND
HER 100-ARTIST ARMY
ARE "JOINING HANDS" TO
BRING TODAY'S ANTI-WAR
FRUSTRATIONS TO THE
NATIONAL STAGE.

"ONE IS LEFT WITH THE HORRIBLE
FEELING NOW THAT WAR SETTLES
NOTHING; THAT TO WIN A WAR IS
AS DISASTROUS AS TO LOSE ONE"
—AGATHA CHRISTIE



FIVE YEARS AGO, IN MARCH 2003, THE U.S. DECLARED WAR ON IRAQ. MOST AMERICANS CAN STILL CLOSE THEIR EYES AND RELIVE THE EARLY IMAGES AND GRAVE HEADLINES FROM THAT AGONIZING MONTH. ALL A VISITOR TO THE HAND TO HAND EXHIBITION AT DUNWOODY, GA.'S SPRUILL GALLERY HAS TO DO IS OPEN HIS OR HER EYES, AND THOSE HEADLINES COVER THE WALLS—LITERALLY.

Hand to Hand, a diary of the Iraq War, was born on Mar. 20, 2003 when Georgia State University graduate and artist Cecelia Kane read about the U.S. invasion. With no other intention than to express her personal feelings on the matter, Kane made a painting of Saddam Hussein and copied the headline, "Saddam: Dead or Alive?" onto a white glove. She dated the fingers and dipped the tips in red. A glove featuring such a headline has been made every day (except for Sundays) since, chronicling battles, bombs, Baby Noor's heart-wrenching surgery, victories, heroes, defeats, deaths, soldier's daily lives and so forth.

"This didn't start as a collaborative project in my mind," says Kane. "It was something that I did in my studio—probably a throwback to a funny feeling I had that this [was reminiscent] of Vietnam right off the bat—and I wanted some kind of personal release. I [made a glove every day] for three years," she continues with an air of duty. "Then, when the 2006 Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center show ended, I said I was going to stop because I couldn't do it anymore. It was just overwhelming.

"Some friends said, 'You can't stop. The war is going, and this is a collection now.' So, they said they would help. I had a meeting at my house, and we literally took out a calendar and they signed up for a



six-day week. We are still doing that now, and I've got artists signed up through mid-October."

The collection, thus far comprised of 1,400 gloves and over 100 individual artists, has toured six different states to date—Georgia, Arizona, California, New York, Tennessee and Alabama. A Boston exhibition is scheduled for fall 2008. The showing at Spruill Gallery in Dunwoody, through this spring was Georgia's second hosting.

"I think it's a really powerful and important piece," says Spruill assistant Susannah Barrow, "especially considering all the political issues surrounding the war. We've had several hundred visitors." She admires the floor-to-ceiling display for a moment, then adds, "We've had a few people that were not so excited about the show, but generally the people that come in are very moved by it. The main comment that I've heard is that they're glad that it's going to be [a traveling exhibit]. It is overwhelming to see something everyone

kind of brushes off at this point because they're so inundated with it through the media, but it's also very powerful to see such attention being paid to the war."

As the parameters of the conflict change, so does *Hand to Hand*. "At first I was still thinking 'mission accomplished,' and that it was going to end quickly," Kane recalls. "I did these quick marker sketches; the gloves were simpler; but then, as 2004 progressed, they got more involved. In 2006, when other artists became involved, I told them they did not have to use actual text, but I wanted them to use and date gloves, make them easy to hang, and to use any source they wanted. The gloves have gotten much more daring [since]."

Why gloves? "My mom passed away 10 years ago," Kane reveals, "and I discovered in her dresser about seven pocketbooks. Back in her era, she [kept] matching gloves in each one. When I pulled the gloves out, some of them still had her shape, and when I put them on I really felt that she was there. I started working with hands in

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other ways [through art], and when I thought about this project and using hands as a stand-in for people, it started because I actually saw the shape of her hands in her gloves."

Each artist's entry into this roving, conceptual "diary" is as personal and individualistic as one would expect to derive from the hardbound sort. As a result, the artist/participants—faces from across the continental U.S. and some from as far as Turkey and Iran—have documented the Iraq War in such a way that visitors can admire their shape, just as the gloves preserved by Kane's mother had done for her a decade prior. Through this free-range form of self-expression, there are weeks of mayhem portrayed through photographs, waxed hands, crochet, plaster, animation, even sound. "I did an 80-minute soundtrack of recordings from CNN during the week when I [made my] gloves," says artist Mitch Lindsey. As he speaks, his own *Hand to Hand* contribution can be seen sitting atop an adjacent set of stereo speakers. "I basically collaged different sound bites that I thought represented the cacophony we're constantly subjected to. This is something that I don't think very many people have weak opinions about. Most are passionate whether they are for or against this war."

Meanwhile, Kane glides from room to room, each of which holds gloves from a specific year. With a sense of pride and personal affinity, she points out the variety of artist perspectives unveiled through the project. "This artist took the printed news stories and made them into a thin ladder, then cut up the gloves at the bottom," she explains. "Another person made little body

bags with the names of the American soldiers who died each day, and stuffed the gloves into the body bags. And this one made the gloves out of Kevlar, which is body armor that the soldiers use."

Painter Deanna Sirlin used the rubber gloves she often employs in her studio to depict the headlines she chose from the New York Times. Roya Pazooki, who was imprisoned in Iran for three years because of her activism during the Iranian Revolution, used child-sized mittens for her assigned week. These days, Pazooki says, she uses art to express her feelings regarding the time she spent as a political prisoner, as well as to voice her protests against the war taking place in Iraq.

As *Hand to Hand*'s lead visionary, Kane's primary function is to arrange future exhibits and schedule a new artist for every week. She makes it a point to note that she promotes artists whose views lie on both the pro and anti-war sides of the fence. "I want a dialogue," she says. "I want this to be a witnessing [more so than a hit-you-over-the-head statement. I want the artists to approach each day as simply stating what the headlines are. In the future, I'd like people to see this as an artist's take on each day, and when they see the individual events that happened, I hope they can recognize] the futility of war, that violence destroys society. Through one image, the metaphor of a hand, all kinds of people can come together to express their feelings."

At deadline, Kane and her army of artists said they will continue *Hand to Hand* until the war ceases. For now, the dialogue continues. **vvv**