

VIEW from the Hill



Steve Sartori

FACE TO FACE WITH FALLEN SOLDIERS

Ariadne Milligan '05 sits in a Shaffer Art Building studio, looking at the portrait she painted of Paul C. Alaniz, a 32-year-old U.S. Marine captain who died in a helicopter crash in Iraq on January 26. "The painting seems like such a small thing to do for someone," Milligan says. "Hopefully his family will enjoy it and appreciate that someone else spent time caring about him."

Milligan, an architecture student in Professor Stephen Zaima's Introduction to Painting course, was among dozens of students, faculty, staff, and community members who contributed portraits of U.S. soldiers to the exhibition *To Never Forget: Faces of the Fallen*, a powerful tribute that originated at the College of Marin in northern California and made its East Coast debut in March at SU. After seeing a television piece about the paintings last November, Zaima contacted the project's organizer, artist Chester Arnold, and arranged for the Syracuse showing. Under Arnold's guidance, Marin students painted 1,109 portraits of fallen U.S. soldiers in Iraq. "This exhibition doesn't take a position on the war," says Zaima, a College of Visual and Performing Arts professor. "It also doesn't pretend to acknowledge all the other casualties, including the Iraqi people. This is just the U.S. soldiers, and we're trying to respectfully present this as a memorial."

For Zaima, the project required steadfast collaboration from start to finish. He called on SU colleagues, students, and local artists to create nearly 300 portraits of soldiers who had died since the Marin exhibition opened in November 2004. The Syracuse exhibition provided a monumental view of the lost soldiers—rows and rows of their faces stretched 96 feet across one wall and continued another 29 feet down

a second wall. The 5- by 7-inch portraits were done in a variety of styles and media, ranging from oil to computer imaging, and showed soldiers in casual garb, fatigues, and full military dress, in high school graduation photos, and in prom snapshots. The exhibition included a book in which visitors shared their thoughts. One visitor, a soldier who served in Iraq, noted a friend represented on the wall. "Very powerful," he wrote. "Putting faces to the names is something I feel everybody must see."

Most of the soldiers' images and biographical information were gathered from web sites and distributed to participating artists by project coordinator Ben Entner '06, a graduate sculpture student. Project manager Ashley McDowell '07, a photography major who organized the installation with Entner and Zaima, says she saw stacks and stacks of photographs of soldiers, but wasn't affected emotionally until she worked on her contribution. "When I sat down to do the portrait, it brought me to tears," she says. "It made me realize he's not just a soldier."

Many students shared McDowell's sentiments. When asked, they commented on the importance of the project, how proud they were to participate, and how fortunate they felt to be pursuing their educations while others were risking their lives in Iraq. "I wanted to do the best I could to show respect toward the soldiers," says Nathan Nottingham '07, an art education major.

Kristin Sorrentino '05, an advertising design major, was sketching her fourth portrait just days before the SU opening. "This is one of the most meaningful things I've done here," she says. "I'm glad to be part of it, and I want to remember these soldiers."
—Jay Cox