

the Spread

ART ATTACK:
Scott Waters

Scott Waters paints a world populated by aggressive, bare-chested army guys doing just what army guys do: play with guns, fight and party. Given that he spent three years in the Canadian Infantry in Victoria, where he was trained to fight on the front lines, his choice of subject matter makes perfect sense.

Through his art, Waters said he is trying to transform his military experiences into something useful.

"I am looking for some way to contribute or benefit from my military service. It is hard to tangibly affect society through art, but at least I'm trying."

Waters's work explores the world behind the valiant image of the army fighting for justice; the Toronto artist's paintings depict what happens when no one is looking, when the boys in the army are left to their own devices to do as they wish.

The veil of military heroism has been lifted many times (Abu Ghraib Prison, anyone?) to reveal its repulsive underbelly, but society continues to exercise selective amnesia, praising the military as an institution. This schism between perception and reality is exactly what Waters addresses in his work.

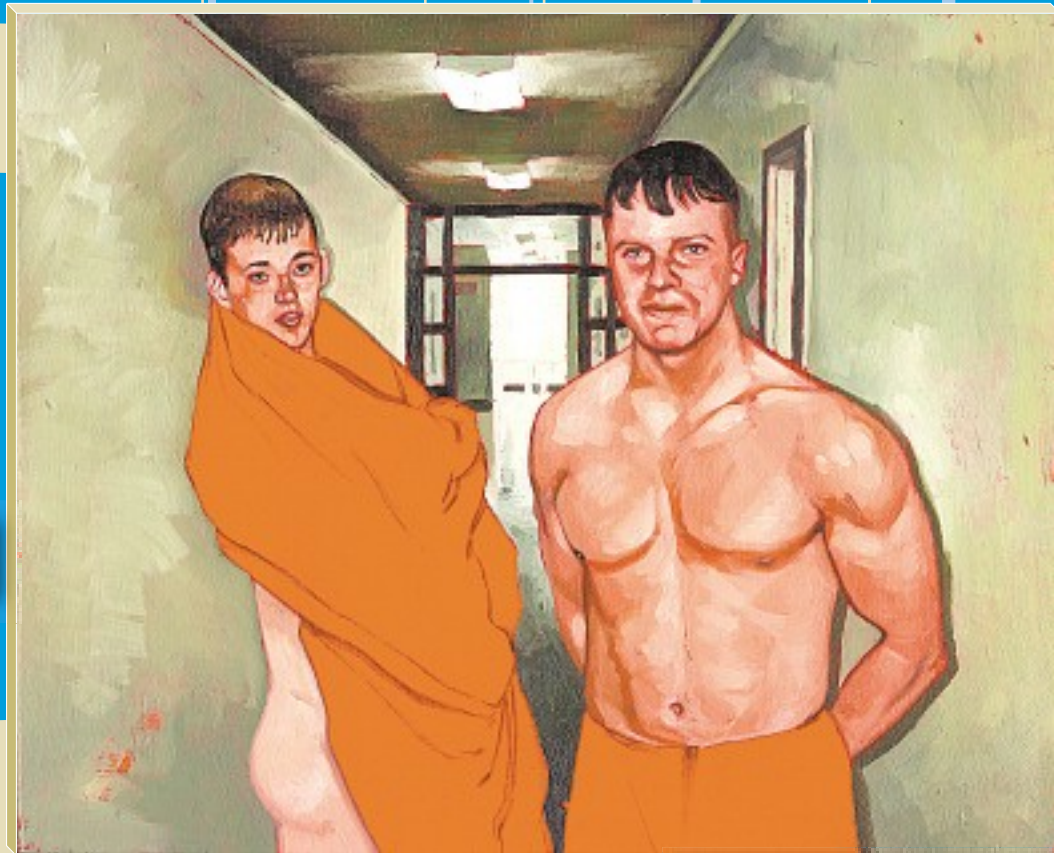
Waters graduated from Toronto's York University with a master of Fine Arts degree in 2004. At 35, he is still considered an emerging artist, but is gathering attention for his social analysis and sharp wit. He already has a handful of purchase awards under his belt (including the Samuel Sarick Purchase Prize through York University and the Art @ Suite 500 Purchase prize through the



REGIMENTAL SONGBOOK REDUX, 2005
OIL ON PANEL, 24 X 18 INCHES

Waters begins with snapshots and paints their images onto plywood panels, emphasizing this process by maintaining the same ratio and flash lighting from his source images. There is a rawness to his work in the way the figures pose. These men and boys have been caught quite literally with their pants, if not their dignity, down. The figures are in casual and frank situations, strutting and playing with guns.

"I am trying to show how previously existing social norms are immaterial within a closed society," Waters said. "For example, prisoner abuse would not be condoned in a public sphere, but in an exclusive environment it is another story."



STORMING THE BEACHHEAD, 2005
OIL ON PANEL, 10 X 8 INCHES



RED DAWN, 2005
OIL ON PANEL, 30 X 24 INCHES



WHAT MAKES THE GRASS GROW?, 2005
OIL ON PANEL, 8 X 10 INCHES

The characters in his paintings are engaged in brutish acts, but presented in such a way that it is almost a challenge to take them seriously.

Schulich School of Business at York University), along with several group exhibitions, including ones in Chicago and New York. He recently had an exhibition at Alternator Gallery in Kelowna, B.C. He is slated to do an artist residency in October 2006 at Open Studio, a printmaking gallery and studio in Toronto, and has been accepted to the Canadian Forces Artist Program to do a series of portrait-based works of an army unit.

The characters in his paintings are engaged in brutish acts, but presented in such a way that it is almost a challenge to take them seriously. In his series titled *The Hero Book*, Waters doesn't hide the figures' awkwardness or vulnerability. The series title comes from a book of the same name used in the military to instill camaraderie and to motivate young soldiers with tales of bravery and adventure. In "What Makes the Grass Grow?" (oil on wood panel, 2005 from *The Hero Book*) a young man sits in front of a glass of beer, posing with a machine gun. The glass appears to be over-sized, emphasizing the soldier's youth. In the series, the not-quite men, not-quite boys, are somewhere between playing childhood dress-up games and acting as authority figures.

Through posing and contrived scenarios, the characters in his paintings highlight the constructed nature of identity and behaviour.

Furthering the notion of artificiality, parts of Waters's paintings consist of coloured silhouettes and ambiguous shapes, making the rendered areas appear more three dimensional, and the flat areas appear flatter. These silhouettes appear as blasts of colour, but also as blank spots in the overall image.

The gaps address the history of painting, Waters said, reminding the viewer that the work is foremost painting rather than historical documentation or photography. Conceptually, the blank spaces are reminders of the subjective nature of memory and ideology.

Waters also implicates himself, flaws and all, in the overtly macho acts depicted in his work, asserting that he makes every attempt to steer away from idealizing himself. No one is more or less a victim of humiliation than he is. Waters is not just critiquing masculine culture, but also his personal role in the world of masculinity through his depiction of the military. — DARYL VOCAT/DOSE

Daryl Vocat is a Toronto-based artist and freelance writer. To see more of Scott Waters's work, go to www.scottwaters.ca.

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