



NO MAN'S LAND

BONNELL ROBINSON AND DANA MUELLER

Art Institute of Boston Gallery at University Hall
1815 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts

November 5 through December 5

USING THEIR CAMERAS, TWO ARTISTS SET OUT ON PERSONAL
JOURNEYS TO RETRACE STEPS AND TO VISIT PLACES WHERE A
FATHER AND A GRANDFATHER'S PASTS BECAME BRIDGES OF
COMMONALITY BETWEEN TWO DIFFERENT WORLD WARS.

Separately, each artist came upon an incongruous serenity where the passage of time had become complicit in silencing the horrors of war. The dissimulation of killing fields and prison camp locations — the creation of seemingly peaceful landscapes — makes for a thought-provoking exhibition of two dozen photographs titled: "No Man's Land."

Bonnell Robinson's images come from the Western Front (France, Belgium) and the Italian Fronts (Austria, Slovenia) of the Great War, which raged from July 1914 to November 1918, and had a final tally of 9,991,000 soldiers dead from combat, and approximately another 27 million wounded or missing in action.

Robinson said her grandfather survived WWI, but could not speak

of it to his family for the rest of his life. It was reading his detailed diary that compelled her to examine those places, inducing sustained reflections within her on all wars since that war. Robinson said she's nearing 60 years of age; her work is to be viewed as a connection to the past, a focus on certain visual evidence of war memories as retrospective documentation.

It's clear that Robinson has an entrenched personal view that wars are utterly futile and end as tragedy: death's feast.

Dana Mueller's images are of locations that once were WWII prisoner-of-war campsites, constructed between 1943 and 1945 throughout the United States. They held 500,000 German soldiers captured in battlefields, many of them from North Africa

and Normandy, and marching under General Erwin Rommel's command.

Mueller immigrated to America from Ernstthal, East Germany where three generations of her family survived hardship from the ravages of war and its fallout; this has made her keen on using her art to illustrate the complexity of human experience not adequately captured in history books.

In acknowledging her heritage, and the collective national guilt that the world has placed on Germans, Mueller said that she is trying to better understand the emotional wall separating what it means to be the perpetrator or the victim, as those roles, dictated by individual circumstance, may reverse.

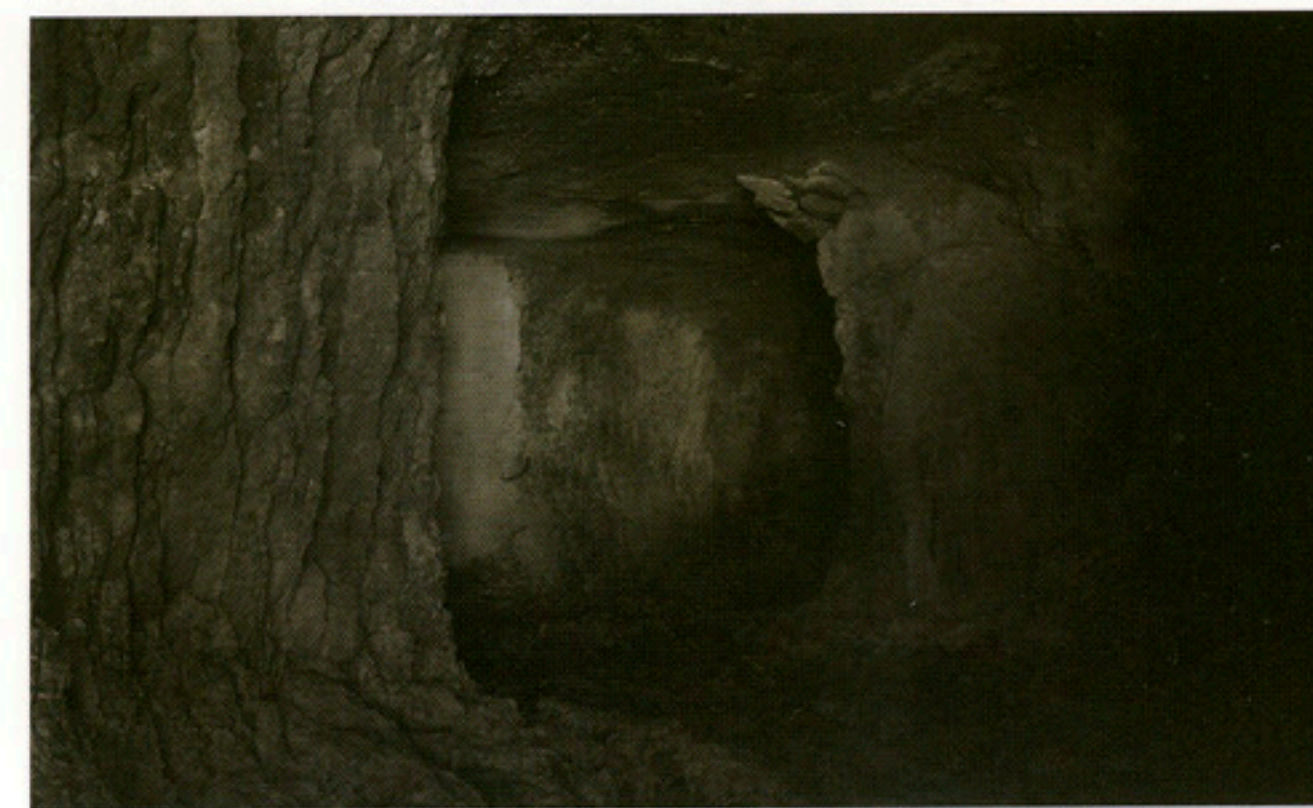
Mueller photographed POW camps that once housed German soldiers

in New England — Camp Edwards and Fort Devens in Massachusetts, and Fort Stark in New Hampshire — along with internment camps in Texas, Nevada and elsewhere nationwide. The photographs show places where German soldiers toiled as farmers tilling fields, picking apples and harvesting crops, paying a laborer's debt atoning for Hitler's atrocities and his expansionist policy of "Lebensraum." Mueller sees these captured German soldiers' fate of toiling on land as no small irony considering their repatriation back to Germany after WWII ended. Mueller observed that many of these young

prisoners conscribed nearing the end of the war held no allegiance to Hitler, and have maintained life-long friendships with Americans whose homes were near the prisoner-of-war camps.

"No Man's Land" is a collection of peaceful, bucolic landscape images that hold secrets from the calamity of war; the transformed scenic beauty is a mirage masking a murderous testament. The exhibit also affirms the stark reminder from a 1794 letter to a friend in which Thomas Jefferson wrote: "War is as much a punishment to the punisher as to the sufferer."

Franklin W. Liu



LEFT PAGE FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Dana Mueller, *Cotton Field*, Sheldon Farm, Edenton, North Carolina, 2009, inkjet print.

Dana Mueller, *Former Fertilizer Plant*, North Carolina, 2009, inkjet print.

THIS PAGE COUNTER-CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Bonnell Robinson, *Tunnel*, Monte Sei Busi, Italy, 2008.

Bonnell Robinson, *Sambre Canal Where Wilfred Owen was Killed*, Ors, France, 2007.

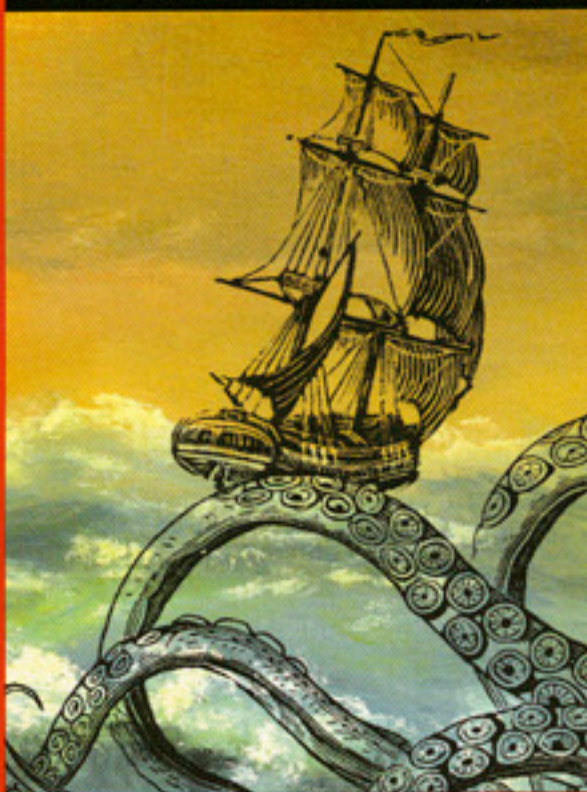
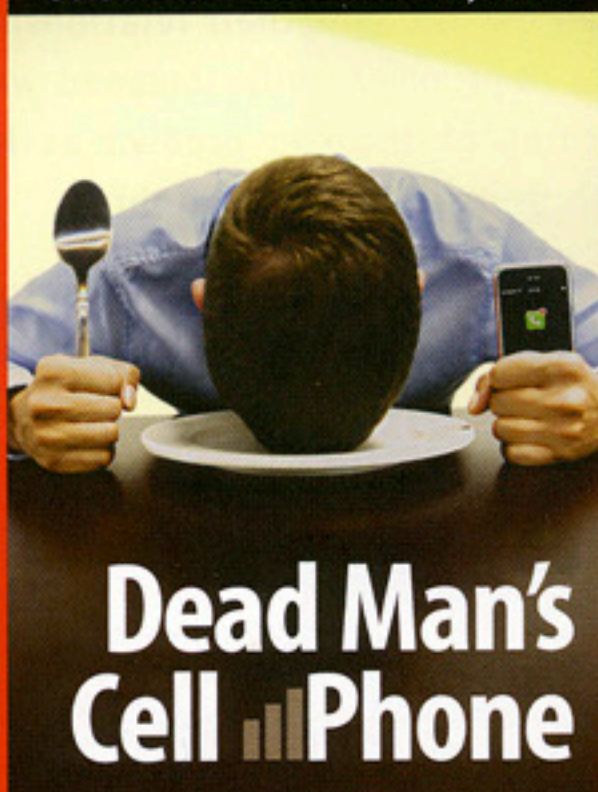
Dana Mueller, *Gettysburg*, Pennsylvania, 2009, inkjet print.

Bonnell Robinson, *Valley of the Marne*, France, 2007.



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