

'Overt' forces look at aggression

By **Joanne Silver**/ Visual Arts
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Clutching a green rifle to his green body, the toy soldier takes aim at the invisible. He is faceless, plastic, a monochrome figure caught forever in a prone position. If he has dreams and fears, they remain locked inside his cheaply molded contours, which still bear ragged edges along olive-drab seams.

What would barely deserve notice in a boy's bedroom has become remarkable in the Tufts University Art Gallery. Digitally enlarged to more than 8 feet, Yoram Wolberger's "Toy Soldier No. 3 (Crawling Soldier)" dominates the soaring space of the Remis Sculpture Court. Its physical presence anchors the exhibition "Overt/Covert," a selection of works exploring various facets of human aggression (through Dec. 21). Symbolically, the gargantuan toy captures the sense of disorientation generated by many of these artworks. Something is not right - in scale, mood, action conveyed. These images resist easy explanation and are difficult to forget.

If Wolberger's soldier suggests the roots of hostility in child's play, then Jim MacMillan's "First Light 9/12/01" stands at the opposite end of the timeline. Here is the apocalyptic aftermath of aggression, rubble smoking in the thin light of dawn. Scale is almost lost in the chaotic collision of forms. It takes a moment to notice the sole firefighter in the foreground, who shoulders the burden of providing perspective to the photographic scene as well as professional expertise at Ground Zero. Both tasks, however, seem almost superfluous in the face of such utter destruction.

Nearly a century earlier, Andre Kertesz recorded the strange merging of World War I soldiers and the land in his 1915 photograph "Forced March to the Front between Lonie and Mitulen, Poland." Hundreds of soldiers, weighed down by gear, form a gracefully curving line that echoes the gentle roll of the countryside. As the men walk toward the horizon, only one turns back in the direction of the photographer. This one face - like the single firefighter in MacMillan's image - serves as a reminder that even the most monolithic effort is composed of individuals. And ultimately, those bearing the consequences are individuals, too, suffering in their own particular ways.

The painter Leon Golub, who died in August, spent most of his 82 years investigating the link between the aggression of males and state-sponsored military hostility. Three large, unframed canvases on the brick walls of the gallery feature ambiguous encounters, lushly rendered. Against a background of tropical foliage and camouflage, the two men in "Mercenaries II (Section IV)" stand beside a Jeep. It is impossible to tell what their connection is to one another or to this odd landscape or to the warfare implied by the title. Golub's monumental "Night Scene III" adds an even thicker layer of haze over the movements of several barely discernible figures, who push and pull against mysterious obstacles lurking within this blue-green world.

By its very nature, photography would seem to offer a clearer view. In the works of Elliott Erwitt, Gilles Peress and Juhan Kuus, however, sharp images do not necessarily remove the questions swirling around conflict. "Sick Abandoned Rwandan Hutu Children in a Dispensary, Goma, Zaire" by Peress focuses on a naked girl with a wrist ID and a tear-stained face who looks in one direction as the three children nearby face in three different directions. There may not be guns or soldiers in this picture, but it is a powerful image of war's all-too-covert tragedies.

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