GERTRUDE KEARNS
THE ART OF COMMAND
Portraits and Posters from Canada’s Afghan Mission

Fort York National Historic Site • March 5 to June 14, 2015
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A catalogue to accompany the exhibition held March 5 to June 14, 2015 at Fort York Visitor Centre

Fort York National Historic Site
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It is my pleasure to welcome Gertrude Kearns and *The Art of Command* exhibition to Fort York National Historic Site. Described by the *Toronto Star’s* Peter Goddard as “unquestionably the country’s leading active contemporary war artist,” Kearns has constantly pushed the boundaries of Canadian war art for the past quarter-century. Her latest body of work – most of which is being seen for the first time at Fort York – should augment that reputation.

Having Fort York host *The Art of Command*, with its focus on the 2001-14 Afghan Mission, might seem a curious choice. The site is best known as the birthplace of modern Toronto (1793) and the home of Canada’s largest collection of authentic War of 1812 buildings. Yet the Fort has maintained strong ties to the military even after becoming a museum in 1934.

Fort York has become a key place to honour military service and sacrifice. Remembrance Day ceremonies have been held at the Fort since 1952. When the Fort hosted the Afghanistan Memorial Vigil in 2014, the Department of National Defence presented us with a copy of the Afghanistan Book of Remembrance. It records the names of two Torontonians who died in that conflict.

Also important is the presence of the Fort York Armoury (1933) within Fort York National Historic Site. Just steps from the new Fort York Visitor Centre, the Armoury is a fully operational DND facility. It houses several reserve units which contributed soldiers to the Afghan Mission. Three officers featured in *The Art of Command* have close ties to the Armoury. Linkages like these, along with events and exhibitions such as this one, help ensure that this National Historic Site remains a vital and dynamic part of the community.

Dr. Larry Ostola  
Director, Museums & Heritage Services  
City of Toronto
Responding to Conflict: Gertrude Kearns, from the Gulf War to Afghanistan and Beyond

It is late summer 1918 and Toronto artist Dorothy Stevens has just been commissioned by the Canadian War Memorials Fund to depict the creation of ships, munitions and aircraft in Toronto for the war effort. Upon completing her commission as an official Canadian war artist, she will turn away from conflict as a subject in her etchings and other art.

Fast-forward nearly a century, and another Toronto artist, Gertrude Kearns, is finishing off a portrait and a poster of Brigadier-General Richard Giguère. She and Stevens seem to share little beyond gender, base of operations, participation in official war art programs, and an interest in printmaking. But the broader legacy of the Canadian War Memorials project will influence Kearns’ work.

Kearns has spent nearly 25 years exploring the nature of military conflict, both officially and as an independent artist. Her art has been based partly on direct experiences gained during domestic military exercises and while being in a theatre of war. In her latest body of work, Kearns’ subjects have come to her Toronto studio to sit for portraits. The ongoing dialogue between Kearns and the soldiers results in a related set of texted art prints.

Giguère – a commander on two separate tours of duty in Afghanistan – is part of this double process. He is one of 18 officers from Canada’s 2001-14 Afghan Mission who appears in The Art of Command. Such access is unparalleled in the history of Canadian military portraiture, a fact made all the more surprising by Kearns’ sometimes controversial status as a contemporary war artist.

The Art of Command represents Kearns’ latest study of the physical expression of military engagement and its psychological impact.
She tackles the nature of command and soldiering in the Afghan Mission in 46 works created between 2006 and 2015. Focused on individual soldiers, the paintings and drawings testify to the immense responsibility borne by Canada’s military leaders. The prints use the individuals as points of departure to address the challenging conditions those leaders operated within.

Canadian war art historian Laura Brandon counts Kearns among those post-1945 artists who feature personal or subjective engagement in their compositions, often challenging “official or more widely held expectations that military art [is], or ought to be, essentially objective.” The interplay between objective/subjective and representational/abstract provides a backdrop for looking at Kearns’ war art since 1991 and as it appears in The Art of Command.

**Engaging with Conflict, 1991-2006**

The Gulf War of 1990-91 inspired Kearns’ first artistic exploration of military conflict. A U.S.-led coalition (including Canada) waged war against Iraq in response to the latter’s invasion and annexation of Kuwait. Her 1991 ‘Conflict Group,’ a mixed media on paper series, featured flattened abstract shapes and menacing hand saws. These works were followed by her first representational war portrait (*Three Airmen, Gulf Crisis, 1993*) and a nightmarish landscape from a pilot’s perspective (*Fires over Kuwait, 1995*).

The Somalia Affair was up next. In *The Dilemma of Kyle Brown: Paradox in the Beyond* (1995), a Canadian Airborne Regiment soldier implicated in the torture and murder of Somali teenager Shidane Arone in 1992 was portrayed weighing his options. The incident was handled more graphically in *Somalia #2: Without Conscience* (1996). It adapted a photo of the actual torture taken
by Brown, meshing it with imagery drawn from the 'Conflict Group.' The painting drew a strong reaction when it was exhibited at the new Canadian War Museum in 2005.

Turning to the Yugoslav Wars of 1991-99, Kearns examined the ethnic cleansing that swept the Balkans and the role of Canadians as peacekeepers. In Resolution, Serbia #1 (1997) she painted a Serbian soldier from multiple perspectives. In The Lie (Screwing the Press/Pressing the Screw) (2000), she questioned the manipulation and culpability of the media in reporting a false event in Kosovo. This acrylic painting was Kearns' first war work to incorporate text.

The Balkans led to Kearns' first painting of a senior Canadian military commander (MacKenzie/Sarajevo/1992) based on sittings in her Toronto studio. A remark made by Major-General Lewis MacKenzie, coupled with a drawing study of him, also resulted in her firsttexted fine art print, PEACE/KILL (2004). What Kearns recognized as oxymoron in MacKenzie's sardonic phrase – “Keep the peace / or I'll kill you” – spoke bluntly to the challenges he faced as the head of UN forces in Sector Sarajevo in 1992.
Before working on MacKenzie, Kearns turned to the inability of UN peacekeepers to prevent the Rwandan Genocide (1994) and the impact of that failure on the Force Commander, Canada’s Roméo Dallaire. Her first portraits of him from 2001 were followed by the ‘UNDone: Dallaire/Rwanda’ series (2002). It comprised six head portraits of the commander in different psychological states (such as Dallaire #4) and three “victim murals,” including a mass of dead Rwandans beneath a UN vehicle (Mission: Camouflage).

All nine works in ‘UNDone: Dallaire/Rwanda’ were painted using enamel on camouflage-patterned tough cloth sourced from a Toronto fabric shop. In late 2001, Kearns’ interest in the art and science of military concealment had been piqued by seeing A.Y. Jackson’s painting, Screened Road ‘A’ (1918). Jackson – like Dorothy Stevens, an official war artist – illustrated the use of camouflage netting to protect troop movements near the Western Front.
Kearns’ research on Rwanda, Dallaire and post-traumatic stress disorder resulted in her first portrait of an officer painted from life. In *Injured: PTSD* (2002), a Canadian veteran of the Rwandan mission flanked by stretchers clutches a UN beret. All forms of personal identification were removed at his request, so he could represent all Canadian soldiers suffering from PTSD.

After engaging with conflict for a decade, Kearns was reaching out to members of the Canadian Forces and was no longer reliant on photos and reports provided by others. In 2001, she had written:
“I suppose one can run the risk of exhausting one’s creative drive in the effort to live a situation. It sometimes feels bizarre to be trying to experience through the imagination what others, many, many others, might give anything to forget... Maybe it’s a desire to live vicariously... to reflect on heroism and morality, [creating] art that suggests a play of conscience.”

With *Injured: PTSD*, Kearns moved into the realm of direct experience. She was soon to become an official war artist and experience the military and war up close. That remarkable degree of engagement with the Canadian Armed Forces has continued up to the present.

The process of becoming “official” was convoluted. Long after the fact, Kearns learned inadvertently that she had been shortlisted to go to Somalia in 1993 with the Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artist Program (CAFCAP). A male artist went instead; CAFCAP was cancelled in 1995. A new Department of National Defence (DND) initiative, the Canadian Forces Artists Program (CFAP), appeared in 2001. Undaunted by Kearns’ public reputation, DND accepted her into CFAP in 2003-05. The program broadened her web of military contacts and understanding of military practice. She attended a FIBUA (‘Fighting In Built Up Areas’) training exercise at Petawawa in 2004. Ink on paper works of the rank-and-file resulted, including the woman seen in *Soldier Study #2, Reserves 31 LIB, Petawawa* (2005).

Kearns was soon thrust into a war zone. After her CFAP assignment ended, Colonel Steven Noonan arranged a DND
contract to embed her with Task Force Afghanistan Roto 0 and ultimately produce six canvases. Kearns spent nearly five weeks in Kandahar and Kabul in 2005-06. Noonan would describe Kearns as "an unconventional artist for an unconventional mission."

Afghanistan was the opening salvo in the Global War on Terror: Canada’s Afghan Mission was a response to the 9/11 attacks on the US and the security threats posed by al-Qaeda. A coalition ultimately sanctioned by the UN sought to dismantle al-Qaeda by eliminating its operational base in Afghanistan. This involved removing the Taliban government and securing the country.

The Canadian government sent armed forces to Afghanistan in late 2001. Regular troops were deployed the next year. Canada’s combat operations ended in 2011; the last Canadian soldiers left in 2014. By then, 162 Canadians had died in the conflict, including 158 soldiers and one diplomat – our greatest military sacrifice since the Korean War, in a mission lasting longer than the First and Second World Wars combined.

One of those deaths occurred while Kearns was embedded. On January 15, 2006, Kearns was in an armoured vehicle preparing to leave the Provincial Reconstruction Team base in Kandahar City. A suicide bomber struck the convoy ahead, killing Canadian diplomat Glyn Berry and two other civilians. Among the 10 wounded were three Canadian soldiers. Kearns would help clean the infirmary after they were brought back to base.
Kearns completed her six DND works back in Canada in 2006. They include portraits of two Canadians – Noonan (Real Deal) and Master Corporal Paul Franklin (Injured Medic) – and one of Colonel Hussein Andiwall of the Afghan National Police (Ancient Modern). The rest are collages of Canadians and Afghans, full of activity and weaponry (Eh-Symmetric and Just War). In Suicide Hit #1, based on the Glyn Berry incident, there is also devastation and chaos.

Portraits and Posters, 2006-15

Her time in Afghanistan affected Kearns profoundly. Returning to Canada, she wrote:

“It can be easier to present a platform, take a position, the less you experience. That does not mean it won’t be done justice. The educated imagination can do quite well. But the real taste of fear, uncertainty, danger, bravery, atrocity is a burden which must be wrestled with. It can wear down your creative powers. It is depression inducing and philosophically debilitating... until your energy and drive are back. Even then maybe it will never be the same.”

Despite her DND commission coming to an end, Kearns re-examined the events of January 2006 as an independent artist. She completed a three-panel painting, What They Gave (2006). Her treatment of three wounded men in hospital settings – the subject of Injured Medic, a second Canadian soldier and an Afghan youth – was raw and uncompromising.
Kearns also re-established her role as resident war artist with the Royal Canadian Military Institute. She had previously considered military leadership in an historical context when the Institute commissioned her to paint Canada’s first native-born head of the Canadian army (General W.D. Otter, 2004). Additional commissions in 2007-08 resulted in paintings of two ‘Canadian’ heroes of the War of 1812 (Tecumseh and General Sir Isaac Brock).

Kearns then plunged back into work related to Afghanistan. In what she calls her “core command” project, she created two parallel and related bodies of work: a set of portraits, rendered as paintings and drawings; and a set of texted art prints based on the portraits. These are the works featured in The Art of Command.

Undertaken without DND’s official sanction, the portraits reflect unprecedented access to Canada’s senior army command (including four lieutenant-generals, two major-generals and four brigadier-generals). This reflects Kearns’ long working relationship with the military and tacit acknowledgement by its leaders of her contribution to interpreting issues of security and defence.

Kearns sought out specific officers to paint, and (understandably to her) was turned down only by General Rick Hillier and a nameless Special Forces commander. All 10 commanders featured in The Art of Command sat for Kearns between 2006 and 2014. Noonan, who had her embedded on
contract in Afghanistan, was first. She sketched, photographed and made a small watercolour of Noonan in Kandahar and Kabul, finishing his muted ink wash on paper portrait in Toronto (Colonel S.P. Noonan, 2006).

The nine acrylic on canvas paintings from 2011-14 represent a unified and complete set of works. Each is dominated by a vividly coloured head set against a black background. The subjects of these psychological studies share a common intensity, resoluteness and maturity. Their military connection is suggested only by a glimpse of their combat shirts and the pixilated camouflage patterns imprinted on their skin and hair.

The camouflage is CADPAT (Canadian Disruptive Pattern). Developed in 1995, the pattern was rolled-out to the troops in Afghanistan in 2002 in four-colour “temperate woodland” and “arid region” versions. To the keen military eye, CADPAT readily identifies Kearns’ soldiers as Canadians. Her use of CADPAT seems to mark (scar?) her subjects indelibly with their Afghan experiences. The effect on some is subtle (Hope, Vance, Jourdain), but extreme for others (Stogran, Dufault, Lessard), who seem to disappear into the camo technology. Only one subject (Fraser) escapes this semi-abstract treatment.
Kearns’ treatment resonated with her subjects, according to one journalist who interviewed some of them in 2013. “The intensity in the picture is reflective of the situation and consequences of failure,” said Major-General David Fraser. According to Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie, his wife thought his portrait “captured the eyes when I have just made a really tough or ruthless decision involving lives.” “Some people might be a bit shocked,” said Colonel Pat Stogran. “But my attitude is ‘more power to our artists and their willingness to depart from convention.’”

The 10 drawings in The Art of Command come from a larger body of work relating to Canadian defence that includes analysts, public affairs officers, photojournalists, and members of non-governmental organizations. All subjects here, save one, sat for Kearns in Toronto. The 2006 drawing study of Noonan, based on her work in Afghanistan, led to the DND-commissioned painting Real Deal. The simple but powerful line work in this three-quarter figure anticipates her later drawings from 2010-15.
At Kearns’ insistence, most subjects more than willingly appeared in their combat uniforms featuring CADPAT camouflage. Though to varying degrees time had passed since the tours being addressed in the works, she wanted the look and feel of them being ‘over there’. They are depicted with assault rifles, sidearm holsters, notebooks, helmets, knee pads and load-bearing equipment. Unlike the paintings, their personal and national identities are obvious from nametapes and patches. Their faces and hands are CADPAT-free monochrome; colour is used only on their uniforms and gear.

Two soldiers wear more formal garb, distancing them from their combat context. Fraser, the subject of three works and whom she had drawn previously in his combats, is in his duty service dress (or “DEUs”), with jacket, tie and ribbons. Sporting medals, gloves, a belt and shoulder chain mail, Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew Zdunich wears the ceremonial “full” dress of the Queen’s York Rangers, a reserve unit he commanded after Afghanistan.

Once the portraits were completed, Kearns moved on to creating texted fine art prints. These “war posters” were made by photographing the paintings and drawings, scanning the transparencies and overlaying text on the digital files. Of the 26 posters in The Art of Command, all but one dates from 2010-15, with half being created in 2012-13.

The design simplicity and textual directness of her first Afghan Mission poster echoes her treatment of MacKenzie. In PLAN/ LEAD (2006), Noonan’s head is flanked by the phrase “Planning from the front / leading from the rear”. He took this not as criticism but as an apt interpretation of the Afghan situation, telling Kearns: “You have created a working concept.”

The bold images and texts on Kearns’ prints resemble those used on posters from the First and Second World Wars, which were intended to boost morale, demonize the enemy and marshal resources for the war effort. Kearns aims to subvert the tradition of selling simple, government-sanctioned messages for mass consumption. “Because these portraits are heroic in nature,” says Kearns, “they are meant to command attention and impart military ethos and the psychological and strategic rationale of modern defence sensibilities.”
For Kearns, her posters function as military portraiture, “editorially tinged defence commentary” and historical records. Her text concepts were developed to varying degrees with the subjects, but all were approved by them in their final format. Forced to confront her interpretation of their experience, the soldiers became unusually complicit in the making of art.

The first posters to be made after the Noonan work (featuring Hobbs, Zdunich, Pitkin) take a stripped-down approach. Kearns calls these works “regimental,” which carries a double meaning. Above the portrait is the name of the soldier’s unit; below is the regimental motto (“Carry On” and “Swift Bold”) or a terse phrase (“Hard Cost”).

Looking back, Kearns describes these 2010-11 works as being “rather tame,” compared to her later, more complex posters that carry “heft.” (“Some of the soldiers were uncomfortable with my ideas, so I decided to start easy, and bide my time,” she notes.) Initially, the texts ran around the print borders outside the portrait, but soon words invaded the main field. A growing volume of text almost overwhelms the image. Journalistic in presentation, the language is often fragmentary and coded.
Slogans, single words, concepts, biographical details, quotations and dialogue appear, along with military jargon and acronyms and the names of military units and operations.

The text provides context for the portraits, often ruminating on leadership, on the challenges faced in (and after) Afghanistan, and the meaning of the war from the soldiers’ point of view. But there are no easy narratives here. In confronting what Kearns calls the “contemporary defence zeitgeist,” some viewers will have to work hard to make sense of the military and the specificities of the Afghan Mission.

Two of the posters in The Art of Command do not depict senior Canadian commanders. They hint at the broader scope of Kearns’ poster project, addressing the consequences of command through two different but related subjects: a battlefield surgeon and a wounded soldier.

Major Andrew Beckett, MD (Blood on His Hands?, 2011) is not a combat commander, but he still bears immense responsibility for those under his care. His hospital unit’s motto, “Hasten to Aid the Soldier,” adjoins some challenging text relating to medical ethics.

The blood on his boots and at his feet is referred to in the text as being metaphorically on his hands.

Beckett sat for Kearns, but the wounded soldier (SAVED: FOR WHAT?, 2011) did not. The image is based on a story and photos shared by a Canadian Forces doctor. The soldier had suffered three lost limbs, a crushed pelvis, internal injuries and likely head trauma, and lived only a few weeks after being maimed. The soldier’s gender, name, rank and nationality are unknown. In this way, the soldier represents all of the casualties of the Afghan Mission.

For Kearns, the subject and text of SAVED: FOR WHAT? acknowledges a Great War painting by another official Canadian war artist, Frederick Varley. In For What? (c. 1918), a makeshift battlefield cemetery is depicted with bodies awaiting burial. Confronting the horror of war, Varley ponders its meaning in relation to the ultimate sacrifice.
By dealing with the living, Kearns’ line of questioning goes in a different direction. What does the future hold for returned soldiers and their families? What might injured veterans expect when they return home? What are the obligations of the state to those who have served? What are the responsibilities of medical science? When is the mission truly over?

**Afghanistan and Beyond**

While Gertrude Kearns created most of the works in *The Art of Command* before the end of Canada’s Afghan Mission, she does not lock her subjects solely into their experiences in Afghanistan.

Some officers, after returning home, assumed new commands. Others retired from the military. Broadening the scope of the series, Kearns connects their new roles to their Afghan War experience.

Pat Stogran, who became Canada’s first Veterans Ombudsman in 2007, is a case in point. After repeatedly criticizing government policy, he was not reappointed in 2010. Stogran’s frustration is expressed unequivocally in Kearns’ poster *ART OF WAR* (2011).

As the Afghan Mission wound down, Canada’s global perspective on security shifted, a fact Kearns refuses to ignore. The text on her most recent posters, like *THE LONG FIGHT* (2014) and *THE WAY AHEAD* (2015), engages with the new threat posed by ISIS. It remains to be seen if Canada’s latest military intervention in Iraq will push Kearns in new artistic directions.

Wayne Reeves
Chief Curator, Museums & Heritage Services
City of Toronto
In this very recent Afghan War series 2006-15, my focus has been senior Canadian Forces leadership in the War on Terror in Afghanistan.

*The Art of Command* is about the profound nature and weight of command in this particular war zone; in so doing it attempts to document aspects of this epic Canadian military engagement, on the ground, and now in our memories.

Presented at Fort York Visitor Centre is the complete series of Canadian Forces’ Afghan War command ‘posters’ (fine art limited edition prints) and curator Wayne Reeves’ selection of most of the CF portraits which are the foundation of those works. Concept, conscience, combat are themes which have fuelled the project since my being embedded on contract with TFA Roto 0 as official war artist in 2005-06. Keeping connected to the mission afterwards became my mission, with an evolving agenda throughout these parallel bodies of work to explore and emphasize strategic, tactical, and operational aspects of command and challenges around Canada’s Afghan Mission.

Those who appreciated our engagement in Afghanistan will hopefully find the work resonating on several levels. Those who found the war obnoxious and our engagement wrong will probably find it irritating, irrelevant or patronizing.

“...This collection uniquely captures both the scale and breadth of effort exacted by 21st century hybrid warfare, over the longest period of sustained armed conflict in our history.” BGen (ret’d) Craig Hilton

*The Art of Command* portraits are in two formats: large mixed media figurative drawings and head studies on canvas. They might suggest the character, persona, and military ethos of each man. I have been asked, ‘Why didn’t you make him more accessible? He’s such a great guy! That’s not how the troops see him!’ I wanted the portraits to convey their internal workings, calculating, planning, under pressure, alone. The works are not about projecting leadership per se. They are about ‘being’ commanders.

“...But let’s be quite clear; this is not about a personality cult!” LGen (ret’d) Marc Lessard
Needless to say the subjects are not shrinking violets. They are professionals in the use of armed force and violence management, expert at assessing strengths and weaknesses in plans and people, at analysis, at retention. They have been leadership-saturated, shaped by forced endurances, physical and mental. These officers have been trained to function efficiently and adeptly in challenging scenarios, and to command.

Based on digital image captures of these portraits are the posters. They are a documentation of sorts using the commanders as subjects in ‘text surround’. These expanded portraits function on three levels: military portraiture, editorially tinged commentary, historical records, inasmuch as most subjects are represented in the context of a specific mission period in the war.

The portraits alone might resonate as ‘war art’. The posters take that same work to a different level via subject and mission identification and description. This is military art, ‘with a twist’. It is equally imperative that these works function as contemporary art. This age of irony, with an understandable penchant for nihilistic predisposition, seeks a powerfully integrated message that can be as crucial as any image prowess. These posters seem to appeal to civilians even if some components are unclear. Even when they function as ‘just guys in uniforms’, and by extension the military in general, there is often some common ground which bridges civilian and defense interpretations. However the work is military in content and can be off-putting to those with a negative bias.

“...There’s something about military language which seems to infuriate the left. Very often, when you hear people attacking war, in a political sense, they focus their ire on the use of military jargon as an example of language being twisted to invoke social control. Here’s the thing: military jargon exists in its own right, and for its own reasons.” Nick Gunz, historian

These posters are the antithesis of traditional war posters which targeted specific audiences for immediate results in war efforts, as slick sales devices, as propaganda. My intentions are contrary in every sense. These ‘posters’ are not made to be reproduced in quantity, understood easily, or sell much of anything. They need to be interpreted, and gradated through some level of understanding of the concerns in question. In other words they are meant for a sophisticated audience and I do not mean that in
an academic sense. They are not ‘real’ propaganda as they are not blatantly selling defense, not even really questioning it. The earlier works in the series aimed to express the hinge in operations via apparent oxymoron. The mid to later works are increasingly more text-laden with military acronyms and my own ‘journalistically’ presented (and sometimes sourced) quotes.

Is a measure of the works’ success its ability to straddle both contemporary civilian and defence audiences? Or is there an unavoidable disconnect?

A Toronto art dealer about 1998 had said, “How could you be interested in this military stuff?” as if I would need to have a screw loose to have pursued CDN defence themes as a visual artist. A curator on a studio visit in 2012 said, “Why don’t you use text in civilian terms to explain what you mean? It is so military!” I said the ultimate challenge for me was to try to enter a defence world ‘space’ and to create a body of work which could resonate with soldiers and analysts, and also satisfy my personal criteria for a new angle on relevant war art. I paraphrase myself:

“I made a major decision way back to incorporate the military terms and lingo, and to identify each subject on his piece. If that identification is uncomfortable, too specific, or if civilians just don’t ‘get it’ then so be it. And if it limits the works’ accessibility and legitimacy as contemporary art, then so be it. That is the risk and price to pay for doing ‘military’ art as a contemporary artist! However I believe there is enough for civilians ‘to get’ regardless. And if there is an air of mystery to the work than that is fine too.”

Contemporary art curator/writer David Liss has been aware of this texted war print project from late 2006. From a savvy contemporary art perspective, he addresses image impact and association and points to text use and interpretation from a civilian and contemporary art perspective:

“I’ve been following this series from the beginning and I’m quite impressed at the evolution. The works now resemble movie posters or rap album covers, which seem like an unsettling position between war, entertainment, pop culture, media and power.

“I assumed that some of the text was military vocabulary but it functions so well graphically that I don’t even think the specific meanings are that crucial. The layout contributes to
the overall character and force of the image: heroic, iconic and propagandistic as most military, rap, pop entertainment and mainstream cinematic imagery tend to be. The surfaces of the works convey all of that and at the same time allude to other, more complex and possibly even contradictory meanings beneath the surface - as there tends to be in art - maybe what separates ‘art’ from other types of imagery.

“It’s interesting to consider the potential difficulties of these works operating in two different cultures, especially esoteric cultures like contemporary art and the military. I imagine that it’s tough to straddle both worlds as an artist and convey the readings and meanings that you intend. I imagine that the art world might dismissively categorize the series as ‘military art’ that exists outside of their accepted paradigms, and that the military world might see these images as irreverent or inappropriate, as they don’t appear to conform to the type of ‘traditional’ representation that they might expect. The work embodies these uncomfortable contradictions and for me it’s these contradictions that contribute to the interest and value of the work.”

The very notion of ‘war art’ conjures the weight of the dark side, and maybe expectations that the artist depict the horrors of war, the ludicrous nature and facade of conflict, and not be empathetic to or seemingly coerced by defence institutions. However I propose that the leadership-permeated, discipline, experience and values of the CDN military mind are cogent and powerful as war art subject matter.

The study of war is morally complicated. War is compromising. War is horrible and it is important. And it can be exciting and intriguing. And in the treating of it as a war artist, I have placed myself on that sometimes arbitrary line between war art and military art; in the last decade this has been a driving consideration in the process of my determining the platform and parameters in depicting each officer within this project. The subjects’ respective commands range from 2002-14, from Op Apollo in Kandahar to our exit and closing mission, training the Afghan National Army in Kabul.
As the prelude to the series, PLAN/LEAD subverts the serious traditional military slag ‘lead from the rear’ into a contemporary working concept when associated with ‘plan from the front’. The subject is MGen (ret’d) Steve Noonan as Colonel, CDN Commander of Task Force Afghanistan Roto 0, 2005-06. He is the hinge into the concept. My intention: succinctly express the underpinnings of strategic approach in this theatre of operations. PLAN/LEAD was my first Afghan War print. As the commander who hired me to paint six canvases post return to Canada, Steve Noonan told me several years later; “We wanted an unconventional artist for an unconventional mission.”

The finale work THE WAY AHEAD (of BGen Richard Giguère, current commandant of Canadian Forces College who withstood this project from early October 2014 until after mid-January 2015) addresses the present with some references to Afghanistan. Quietly at the base, in acknowledgement of the Paris Unity March of January 11, 2015:

“The studio sittings in Toronto spanned the Oct 20th and 22nd fatal attacks on our two CDN soldiers, Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Corporal Nathan Cirillo in Ottawa; the portrait was completed January 7th 2015, the day of the fatal attack on the offices of satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris, prior to the kosher supermarket killings near the Porte de Vincennes in eastern Paris on January 9th.”

The Noonan piece reductive, the Giguère work complex, as bookends. All works in between evolved differently according to each subject. Going in, I had a basic sense of the territory I wanted to cover and how I wanted to do that, and the commanders knew that, but along the way things enter the equation and shift perceptions and positions.

“...The comments on the sides etc she decides for herself…. but some can be quite subtle unless you do a lot of study into who she was painting...” LGen (ret’d) Andrew Leslie

Because each commander is identified on his piece, I always made it clear at the onset that I would present nothing in the final draft for printing without his respective ‘OK’. This is a self-initiated non-commissioned project, so I have not had a boss. I was directing the ‘what and how’. Some of these men were still in uniform; and those recently retired were still connected to the defence world...
in various capacities. I needed to respect that. It did not constrain
the project. On the contrary, I believe that access, their willingness
to engage, has made this unique. I always pushed to proceed with
my preferred text choices. At times, the greater the resistance on
their part initially, the more profound in the final analysis.

“...Gertrude’s technique of combining text with her art... is
the result of many hours of discussion and negotiation.” BGen
Omer Lavoie

Historians can deal with a volume of material in depth. At best I
could only suggest a breadth. At the risk of overloading the works
visually with too much information, I have used a tiered, even
kaleidoscopic approach. Graphically exaggerating high-impact text,
like a lead or a headline, can simplify the process of ‘reading’ the
works. Not everything needs to register at once. There are layers
within each piece, and interrelationships between works.

Writing and drawing at the same time? One might assume a
process conflict? The portrait influences the text and the text
influences the portrait. They developed in tandem, anywhere from
several months to several years per piece.

“...throughout the sittings your pen hit the pages of your
notebook as often as your pencil met the canvas, as much
like an eager journalist as a soulful artist.” Col (ret’d) Pat Stogran

I have tried to avoid being formulaic both in the portraits and the
texted prints, in look and content. To varying degrees the nine
large head paintings each incorporate the CADPAT camouflage.
In some the hair becomes a helmet, or the beard patterned, or
the side of a face metallic CADPAT, or it is in the creases of the
face. MGen (ret’d) Fraser; the only one with no patterning on his
face, has the most graphic treatment of his uniform. LGen (ret’d)
Lessard, in the final head study, his face submerged in the pattern,
is the darkest of them all. Is he turning his other cheek? I don’t
think so. Just try me, it’s saying. It is an island of a wound, dried
bloody CADPAT. The experience of war at his level of command.
These warriors hold their ground, their gazes unequivocal.

“The intensity you see in the picture is reflective of the
situation and consequences of failure. Failure of a country, a
coalition and minority governments at the time.” MGen (ret’d)
David Fraser
Does the text challenge, expand or constrain the portraits for the artist and the subject, and the viewer? Some have said the portraits don’t need the words. They are stronger on their own. Conversely, is the text enhanced with the portrait? Or does the text just neutralize the portrait, and leave the piece neither here nor there? Or is the text inconsequential on its own, or just too hard to read as presented? Or complemental? Or does it inform or merely sensationalize?

Again this is military art, but also war art. And it should be arresting and disquieting. It will be interesting in this first public exhibition of the series to gauge the reactions.

There may be content which might infuriate veterans, perhaps as vociferously as the reaction to my amputee war print SAVED: FOR WHAT?. This subject, whose image I wept over in the process, was the only soldier who did not, and could not, sit for me. Most atrociously injured, he represents the sheer horror of the battlefield in this type of war today.

With great consideration to him, and as an homage to our great Canadian war artist, I referenced Frederick Varley’s famous 1918 WWI painting For What?, adapting its title in SAVED: FOR WHAT?. Both provocative medical pieces within the larger series, the war surgeon and the triple amputee have had strong support from veterans. However the latter has invoked a range of very intense reaction, some broaching on hate mail. Here are four candid CDN and US vet responses that span three generations:

“...This alongside your trauma surgeon are, as the kids say, ‘The Shit’! At least I think they say it! If they don’t, it is meant to mean ‘Wow’.” LCol (ret’d) Pat Stogran, CDN commander and Afghan vet

“Wow. I was quite viscerally moved by those posters. We actually just did a triple amp a couple of weeks ago on an Afghan soldier. He has even less of a chance of doing well in this country.” US military surgeon and Afghan vet Mike Woll

“Terrifyingly beautiful — bravery of the victim aside, it is a message about the futility of war.” Sgt (ret’d) Billy Willbond, the most senior vet and vets advocate

“You disgust me at the most base level. You’re not even a Pig. More like a crow feasting on their lost limbs.” From the
youngest, a CDN Afghan vet (name withheld)

The image enrages, revolts, and satisfies. From ‘not even a Pig’ to ‘Wow’ to ‘The Shit’ to ‘terrifyingly beautiful’, all veterans. I wrote immediately to each of the objecting vets and apologized for disturbing them with the image they had come across and shared online. Saying first the working image was directly from a professional military source, that the devastatingly injured soldier was not a Canadian though I was not at liberty to identify him, I clarified that this soldier’s injuries were not survivable for long and most definitely he was not the Canadian soldier they assumed him to be and whom they assumed I had gratuitously made a subject without his permission. I also said that it was my job to disturb sometimes. Otherwise what would I be? Just a palatable jingoistic military illustrator? We are talking about ‘war art’. Not easy military illustration. And whether seen as pro-war, or anti-war, these works are about war.

These commanders have been my hinges into operational and command aspects of the war in Afghanistan. Each has become a platform for certain ideas and discourses in my attempt to learn about and represent this period of military history.

The portraits have been called heroic and monumental. As leaders who command attention and impart military ethos, on a more subtle level the portraits are meant to convey the psychological, intellectual and strategic rationale of contemporary defence sensibilities.

Too edgy as military art in some quarters, because the military is big on tradition. Too military as contemporary art maybe because liberal arts ‘institutions’ more often than not embrace ‘the anti-institutional’; for what is acknowledged to be more institutional than the military and defence world?

The Art of Command might depart from traditional and contemporary notions of military art. Too oblique to ‘read as’ propaganda, but with an attitude that might ‘look like’ propaganda, in describing our most recent long war and looking at what might be facing us now, these works respond to the urgency of the times.

Gertrude Kearns
Toronto, January 28, 2015
The unusual degree of collaboration between the artist and her subjects merits the inclusion of statements by the latter: Gertrude Kearns obtained all of the statements in early 2015, except for Major Andrew Beckett in 2011 and Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie (through Peter Goddard) in 2013.

The military ranks given below are as of 2015 and may differ from those used in the artwork titles. The subject either held a lower rank at the time of sitting, or wore the insignia reflecting his rank at the time of his service in Afghanistan.

**MGen (ret’d) S.P. NOONAN:**
Gertrude Kearns is our war artist. Kabul to Kandahar, or K2K as we called it in 2005/2006. Although we only moved 500 km it was along a road drenched in history with the ghosts of Genghis Khan, the British General Roberts and the casualties of the Russian Bear haunting its ditches. Convoy after convoy, transport plane after transport plane, soldier by soldier; the Canadian contribution was built in Kandahar as it prepared to go forth and engage the enemy – and so too the Taliban. On 15 January 2006, a suicide bomber attacked a Provincial Reconstruction Team convoy on its way back from a patrol, killing our one diplomat, Glyn Berry, and seriously wounding three others, the most well known being MCpl Franklin whose heroic struggle to regain some semblance of his former life after losing both his legs is well documented. Gertrude was there – helping the casualties as they moved through the unit medical station for onwards transit to the Kandahar Airfield hospital. Doing what she could to be useful and fully aware that she was part of something significant. Forever influenced by these events, Gertrude paints from the heart and captures the frailness of the human being and the power and courage of humanity.

**LGen (ret’d) Andrew LESLIE:**
War can be very direct and blunt, but Gertrude’s work has levels of nuance and subtlety that really makes one step back and think hard as to what she is trying to say through her art. When she asked me to sit for her I was not sure, but she then convinced me by engaging in a long and wide-ranging discussion on the more advanced ideas behind the recent Canadian Army Counter-Insurgency Doctrine Manual, a brisk and well-researched analysis of the 2009 Army Business Plan, and a thorough and very complete debate about the 2011 Transformation Plan. She had done more research and reading into the latter than most of the
senior officials in DND, which is saying something... both ways! How could I say no? The lady does exhaustive research on her subjects and really, really knows her stuff.

The idea of a traditional painted portrait of soldiers offers a degree of permanence and stability into what is an otherwise very chaotic and fast-paced world, essentially a frenzy of activity and ongoing series of crises that one might expect when participating in or running an Army that is fighting a brutal war. As to how others may see the portrait, either tomorrow or 50 years from now, that is something they will decide for themselves. The neat thing is that anybody who takes the time to understand the context of her art will have a different point of view on what messages they see, or what they might mean.

MGen (ret’d) David FRASER:
Gertrude Kearns is this generation’s war artist and so much more. She captures the weight of command in a manner that reflects what war artists in the past have done and she adds a new dimension. She goes beyond to learn about the commander and his challenges and pressures faced in today’s complex environment. Her works are a ‘portrait’ of complexity which more fully tells Canada’s role in conflict in this century.

BGen Richard GIGUÈRE:
Gertrude Kearns helps us visualize and put into perspective those years the Canadian Armed Forces were deployed in Afghanistan. The faces of commanders and leaders who played an important role in the Afghan campaign, from Kabul to Kandahar province, from occupying senior staff positions in different operational headquarters to leading Joint Task Forces in the field. Commanders and leaders who made a difference in a country torn by conflicts and who were supported by outstanding Canadian and allied soldiers, all united for the same noble cause.

Always extremely professional, Ms. Kearns judged it important to capture not only the physical traits and the uniforms of these military actors, but also their reflections, queries, thoughts and motivations. Consequently The Art of Command becomes an important project depicting a long military campaign, allowing generations to come to better understand the state of mind of military members who played a significant role in the intense traffic and noise of Kabul or in the sand and extreme heat of Kandahar. Military members who, so proudly, wore the Maple Leaf
on their shoulders, representing their country days in and days out, maintaining the great reputation Canada has in the Central Asia region.

**LGen (ret’d) Marc LESSARD:**
_The Art of Command_ highlights some of the Canadian Army commanders during Canada’s combat operations in Afghanistan. But let’s be quite clear; this is not about a personality cult! It has very little to do with the individuals. I reluctantly accepted to be one of the subjects because I believe it is a way Canadians will gain a better perspective of Canada’s effort in Afghanistan.

I would hope that visitors looking at these works reflect on the difficult conditions our soldiers faced. Whether it was the extreme heat, the dust or the omnipresent Taliban threat, our men and women persevered. It was about accomplishing the mission but also ensuring that we made a difference in the lives of Afghans.

**BGen (ret’d) Craig HILTON:**
Kearns provides an introspective lens through which to view Canada’s war in Afghanistan as witnessed by many of those military leaders charged with waging it. This collection uniquely captures both the scale and breadth of effort exacted by 21st century hybrid warfare, over the longest period of sustained armed conflict in our history. Through the text, and most particularly in the faces themselves, _The Art of Command_ recounts the hard realities of the tactical fighting level, at national and coalition operational command, and at the strategic level of national power. While much analysis of Canada’s Afghanistan experience is destined to follow in coming years, Ms. Kearns has offered up an essential ‘ground truth’ contribution that leads the way.
LCol Steve JOURDAIN:
It is something very special to see yourself through the eyes of an artist. When you take a close look at it, you realize that Gertrude Kearns, through her portraiture, was able to zero in on the essence of the commanders. She incorporates text from various sources into the posters as her reflection of the mission and of the commanders. In another sense the war prints tell stories, using the words of her subjects and of those who knew them, hence allowing the viewer a much more complete picture.

LCol François DUFault:
What should be learned from the campaign against insurgency (COIN) in Kandahar Province, in the District of Panjwaii between 2010 and 2011? For five years, Canadian progress was modest and scattered with frequent setbacks due to lack of resources and unification of efforts by all the partners who worked in Afghanistan. The arrival of Chinook helicopters, drones for surveillance and strike, other sophisticated surveillance systems and mainly the troops’ saturation and unification of effort based on a security-based approach to governance and development, created the perfect storm.

The BG 1er R22ER [the Van Doos], with the establishment of combat counter-insurgency actions, resulted in success. From the Commanding Officer to the soldier on the front lines, all members of the unit were imbued with the motto: FIGHT – CONVINCE – BUILD. Every action on the ground reflected this spirit, contributing to the success of the mission. The completion of major projects, such as the construction of the road between Hyena BeP and Mushan and other paved roads in the district, helped to increase the economic growth of the region, providing opportunities for engaging with people with difficult chronic conditions. The professionalism of those patrolling each village vigilantly, from the first to last day of the mission, on foot, day and night, tirelessly ensuring that villages were free of IEDs, cannot be ignored, nor forgotten. With their courage and sacrifice, the district was ‘detoxed’ of any insurgent presence. Each joint patrol was visible to the local population so that they felt the aura of security around them, thereby increasing the effects of information operations and exerting a real psychological toll against the insurgents. The Panjwaii district in 2011 when Canada ended its combat mission was not an oasis of peace comparable to some North American suburbs. However, due to the mental
agility of the troops involved, our combat operations have left an indelible and positive impression on all the people.

Col Ian HOPE:
Soldiers do not take themselves into combat. They are led there, and do their gruesome business on the battlefield because of the determination and force of will of their commanders. Commanders in battle make the hardest decisions known to humankind. The Art of Command reveals this. It has been researched with great scope and depth, and the words and phrases give meticulous attention to important fine detail. They tell of the true challenges and complexities of this modern conflict. And the portraits themselves capture the timeless essence of the soul of command in war.

Col (ret’d) Pat STOGRAN:
I am very excited that your portraits are beginning to attract broader attention, and especially honoured to have been featured in the series for posterity. I have no doubt that you and your body of work are going to have a tremendous impact not only on the arts community but also on how history will interpret our debacle in Afghanistan and the people who contributed to it.

That rawness in your work struck me before I became one of your subjects. Your earlier depictions of Brown, Matchee and Dallaire grabbed my attention a long time ago, long before I knew or really cared who ‘Gertrude Kearns’ was, which is testament to my assertion that your work is so powerful, important, and stands on its own! It caused me to reflect in a meaningful way that contributed to my spiritual development as a warrior! Having posed for you at some length for your more recent pieces, I can now understand why. You were as engaged in capturing my thoughts and reflections as you were my image. I swear, throughout the sittings your pen hit the pages of your notebook as often as your pencil met the canvas, as much like an eager journalist as a soulful artist.

What I appreciate in your depictions of me is their innocence. They are revealing without being judgmental. The sound bites and the respective portraits they encapsulate offer the active observer a much deeper insight into the character of your subjects than either words or pictures could on their own. As such their notoriety is certain to grow as we struggle to find our way in these troubled times.
You have developed a kindred spirit with the Warrior of Conflict in the 21st Century. That’s one of the things that I found so compelling about the journey you and I took together into my past and what you came up with in the end. As I said way back, “Don’t risk turning your soulful works into collectible-like hockey cards! Keep it raw, keep it real, keep it yours!”

BGen Omer LAVOIE:
To be up front right out of the gate, the “RCR” [Royal Canadian Regiment] in me made Kearns’s project something that I was uncomfortable with, both in idea and especially in execution. Though, holding a rifle at the “Port Arms” for several hours at a time was a good core workout. But gentle coercion by my superior chain of command and even less gentle persuasion by Gertrude prevailed, and here I am.

Gertrude’s technique of combining text with her art is extremely powerful and is the result of many hours of discussion and negotiation and I can attest that she would make an excellent tactical interrogator. In hindsight, though, I felt this was a very introspective experience where we discussed war, demons, command and most importantly, soldiers. It allowed me to look back and in some cases relive my experience in commanding in combat as a young Battle Group Commander, but from the perspective years later as a Division Commander and as a General. Through that aperture, I found some solace surrounding hard decisions made in battle by both me and my superiors. Certainly not from the fruitless perspective of “what ifing” but rather from a more holistic, strategic to tactical understanding. Going back to my opening remarks here though, I am grateful in the end that Gertrude allowed this work to be about my tough, courageous and professional soldiers that I had the privilege to serve with in combat. It is their achievements and sacrifices that made The Art of Command possible.

LGen (ret’d) Peter DEVLIN:
Gertrude Kearns masterfully focuses on the challenges of leading in modern combat. She touches the expression as well as the motivations of her subjects, and magically gets inside each individual she paints with a rare level of creativity that makes every piece unique. Ms. Kearns has witnessed the Canadian Forces, NATO and Coalition operations from the inside, and has felt the emotion, turmoil and challenge of today’s complex military operations. Gertrude reflects on courage, heroism and
morality as she bravely works to present a truth that is not always comfortable.

**LCol (ret'd) Andrew ZDUNICH:**

Eye-witness experience is regarded as a critical factor in the authority for war art. Gertrude Kearns takes a humanistic approach leveraging first-hand knowledge of her subjects, bringing forth powerful images of the people they were then and who they have become thereafter as they dealt with their experiences. Her work is remarkable and thought-provoking because of the frank nature and brutal honesty her combination of images and text evoke. They are simultaneously unique, complex and multi-dimensional – very much like the conflict itself and the people who fought it. As in all wars, the human element is critical, and this rightly is Ms. Kearns’ focus despite what may be a tendency to believe it is about Strategic, Operational or Tactical commanders. Instead it is about the experiences of Canadians with a deep sense of duty, conscious of their role in the proudest and most noble of professions, voluntarily putting themselves in harm’s way on behalf of a nation, and suffering the traumas associated with their roles. In the end the portraits and posters coalesce into an image not of stereotypical military automatons, but of human beings who represented through their actions the simultaneous determination and unease of a country forged in, but not used to, war.

The decision to adopt a more formal air for this portrait compared to the combat-oriented poses of others was met with some unease by the subject, who had commanded a reconnaissance squadron in Afghanistan in 2004, and went on to command a reserve regiment with deep roots in Canadian, Ontario and Toronto history. Initially dubious about being segregated from his operational background and what was for him a defining moment personally and professionally, Ms. Kearns’ approach via discussions before and during sittings succeeded in holding a mirror to her subject through both the imagery and selected text, forcing an introspection on the reality of individual contributions examined from the perspective of an outside observer. Diverging from her combat-uniformed images, Kearns brings forth the formal, traditional elements of what binds the family grouping that is a Regiment which is the touchstone for every soldier. The colours are deeply symbolic and resonate with military personnel, most particularly her subject who himself encapsulated the attachment to military tradition and purpose.
which is a major part of his character. Moreover, given that a cornerstone of our Army’s success in prosecuting the war in Afghanistan was the unwavering support of our communities and the commitment of our Reserve soldiers from whence they hailed, Ms. Kearns touches on an often overlooked element of the Afghan war: a renewed domestic communications focus of the Army. Regiments that had heretofore been hidden, almost tolerated elements of towns became rallying points for the greater support effort. Communities re-adopted their uniformed personnel, came to admire and associate with the pride felt by those who were prepared to sacrifice all in the name of their country, and fostered a paradigm shift of opinion by a Canadian society that, for much of the post-Korean War era, had seen the military as an unfortunate necessity.

Maj Jon HAMILTON:
_The Art of Command_ is a window into the unseen side of soldiers who have experienced modern warfare. The portraits connect the observer with the very soul of each subject, and are reinforced by the surrounding articulations that provide context to the raw emotion, thoughts, and personal humanity of each individual warrior: When looking at each piece, one forms an immediate and intimate relationship with the subject that goes far beyond a simple appreciation for the portrait. Unique in every facet of war artistry, Kearns tells an Odysseus-like epic in a single frame of work that takes one on an emotional journey like no other.

Col Dwayne HOBBS:
_The Art of Command_ provides a unique perspective on the nature of contemporary command. Gertrude Kearns’ work is ruthlessly honest. Her subjects remain resolutely powerful despite appearing exposed, wounded and conflicted. Kearns captures the complexities, inconsistencies and contradictions that burden Commanders in war. The work challenges the lazy jingoism of our military past, and glorifies neither war nor the warrior. The faces are reminiscent of roughly hewn stone, devoid of warmth or softness yet the eyes reveal care, compassion and humanity. Kearns has captured the anti-heroic nature of contemporary military command with the complete cooperation of her subjects. The subjects leave no room for moral relativism nor do they hide from the truth: they are what they are. The body of work is fearless and self-assured.
Maj Andrew BECKETT:
Every time I look at Gertrude Kearns’ painting, *What They Gave*, it transports me back to the combat hospital intensive care unit in Kandahar, Afghanistan. I feel the raw-edged tension come back, the feelings of desperately trying to save a young man’s life and the bitter feelings of defeat as we lose them in the trauma bays, the operating room and the intensive care units.

Kearns’ jagged-edged work brings back the raw sights, sounds and pungent smells of the wartime intensive care unit. Her use of raw lines and garish colour take me back to those days of death, sacrifice and the horrific pain of patients.

The open abdomens, the blood-soaked dressings, the devastating amputations, the ashen-faced comrades and commanders visiting their fellow soldiers, who now lie maimed by the savagery of war.

Her work brings back those long nights in the intensive care unit with the sounds of the incessant beeping of the monitors, the calls of the nurses and doctors for more blood, and the Taliban prisoners screaming “Allah, Allah” throughout their sleepless, delirious nights. These sounds of humanity overlie the drone of jet fighters screaming overhead and constant thump, thump, thump of helicopters bringing in new patients. There is never the peace of silence for the victims of the dust and horror of the Afghan war.

The smell of the combat hospital that comes back to me is of dirty wounds, fresh blood and draining bowel contents from open wounds. These smells overlie the stench of sweat and human fear. Kearns’ power to make me revisit this time makes me feel the sweat, fear and dust of Afghanistan again. I often avoid looking at these images because of the discomfort of memory they cause. For a war artist, I can think of no greater praise.
Colonel S.P. Noonan, 2006
Ink wash on paper
101 x 81 cm
Collection of the artist
Colonel (ret’d) Pat Stogran, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
137.2 x 106.7 cm
Collection of the artist
Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
137.2 x 106.7 cm
Private collection
Colonel Ian Hope, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
137.2 x 106.7 cm
Collection of the artist
Major-General David Fraser, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
137.2 x 106.7 cm
Collection of the artist
Brigadier-General Omer Lavoie, 2013
Acrylic on canvas
137.2 x 106.7 cm
Collection of the artist
Lieutenant-General Jonathan Vance, 2013-14
Acrylic on canvas
137.2 x 106.7 cm
Collection of the artist
Lieutenant-Colonel Steve Jourdain, 2013
Acrylic on canvas
137.2 x 106.7 cm
Collection of the artist
Lieutenant-General (ret’d) Marc Lessard, 2014
Acrylic on canvas
137.2 x 106.7 cm
Collection of the artist
Lieutenant-Colonel François Dufault, 2014
Acrylic on canvas
137.2 x 106.7 cm
Collection of the artist
Colonel Steve Noonan, 2006
Mixed media on paper
127 x 90.2 cm
Collection of the artist
Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew Zdunich, 2011
Mixed media on paper
134.5 x 91.5 cm
City of Toronto Museums & Heritage Services, 2013.10.1
Colonel (ret’d) Pat Stogran as Lieutenant-Colonel, 2011
Mixed media on paper
147.4 x 91.5 cm
Collection of the artist
Major-General David Fraser, 2012
Mixed media on paper
148.5 x 90.8 cm
Collection of the artist
Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie, 2012
Mixed media on paper
148.5 x 89.5 cm
Collection of the artist
Lieutenant-General (ret’d) Marc Lessard as Major-General, 2013
Mixed media on paper
150 x 91.5 cm
Collection of the artist
Lieutenant-General Peter Devlin, 2013
Mixed media on paper
118.8 x 91.5 cm
Collection of the artist
Lieutenant-General Jonathan Vance as Brigadier-General, 2013
Mixed media on paper
127 x 96.5 cm
Collection of the artist
Colonel Ian Hope, 2014
Mixed media on paper
132 x 91.5 cm
Collection of the artist
Brigadier-General Richard Giguère, 2015
Mixed media on paper
126 X 90 cm
Collection of the artist
PLANNING FROM THE FRONT

LEADING FROM THE REAR

PLAN/LEAD [Colonel Steve P. Noonan], 2006
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 101.5 cm
Collection of the artist
Carry On [Lieutenant-Colonel Dwayne Hobbs], 2010
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
72 x 47 cm
Collection of the artist
Hard Cost (Captain Charles Pitkin), 2010
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
72 x 47 cm
Collection of the artist
Swift Bold [Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew Zdunich], 2011
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
72 x 47 cm
Collection of the artist
Blood on His Hands? [Major Andrew Beckett], 2011
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 101.5 cm
Collection of the artist
SAVED: FOR WHAT?, 2011
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 101.5 cm
Collection of the artist
COWBOY P@ [Colonel (ret’d) Pat Stogran as Lieutenant-Colonel], 2011
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
34 x 23 cm
Collection of the artist
ART OF WAR [Colonel (ret'd) Pat Stogran], 2011
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
TRANSFORMATION [Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie], 2012
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
34 x 23 cm
Collection of the artist
SCIENCE OF WAR [Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie], 2012
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
JUST WAR THEORY [Brigadier-General David Fraser], 2012
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
HOPE OF WAR [Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope], 2012
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
FOR MY SOLDIERS [Lieutenant-Colonel Omer Lavoie], 2013
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
LIGHT 'EM UP [Captain Jon Hamilton], 2013
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
WAR ON TERROR [Brigadier-General Craig Hilton], 2013
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
CONCEPT AND WAR [Brigadier-General Jonathan Vance], 2013
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
DON'T CALL ME DUDE [Major-General (ret'd) Marc Lessard]. 2013
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
STRATEGIES + ORDERS [Major-General David Fraser], 2013
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
JE ME SOUVIENS [Lieutenant-Colonel Steve Jourdain], 2013
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
APPROCHE + COIN [Lieutenant-Colonel François Dufault], 2014
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
WORTH THE SHOT [Lieutenant-General (ret’d) Marc Lessard], 2014
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
THE BIG PICTURE [Brigadier-General Jonathan Vance], 2014
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
THE LONG FIGHT [Colonel Ian Hope], 2014
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
THE WAY AHEAD [Brigadier-General Richard Giguère], 2015
Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper
152.5 x 111.5 cm
Collection of the artist
About Gertrude Kearns

Born 1950, St. John’s, NL. Educated at Richview Collegiate, Etobicoke and Royal Conservatory of Music, Univ. of Toronto, ARCT (Piano-Performer and Teacher). Toronto portraitist/abstractionist since 1978, has worked officially and unofficially as a CDN war/military artist for over two decades in large format drawings, paintings and texted fine art prints.

Canadian Forces exercise May 2013 was RCN, 17 days on HMCS Algonquin for Trident Fury/JointEX; official contracted war artist with Task Force Afghanistan Roto 0 2006 Kandahar; Canadian Forces Artists Program 2003-05.

Collections: Canadian War Museum; Department of National Defence TFA Roto 0; The Toronto Scottish Regiment, PPCLI Calgary and DND collections; Art Gallery of Nova Scotia; Portrait Gallery of Canada; Canadian university, municipal and provincial collections; private collections.

Resident war artist at the Royal Canadian Military Institute, Toronto; 2007-08 RCMI commissioned War of 1812 portraits of Chief Tecumseh and General Isaac Brock, installed in the Lieutenant-Governor’s suite Queen’s Park 2012-14.


Numerous publications include: Canadian Art magazine 2002; Ars Medica 2005; ‘Art and War’ by Laura Brandon 2007; Carte Blanche 2: Painting (Established) 2008; SITREP 2010; ON TRACK, CDA 2011; SHARP Book for Men 2014; n.paradoxa 2015.

http://ccca.concordia.ca/
Upon becoming Upper Canada’s first Lieutenant-Governor in 1792, John Graves Simcoe was charged with finding a site for the provincial capital that would not be threatened by the new American republic to the south.

In July 1793, Simcoe established a garrison at the entrance to a large natural harbour on the north shore of Lake Ontario. The garrison – Fort York – was intended to protect a new community, the Town of York. Three years later, the town became Upper Canada’s capital; in 1834, the town became the City of Toronto.

Fort York represents more than the genesis of urban Toronto. The site was the location of a battle during the War of 1812 when British, Canadian and First Nations combatants defended York against US forces. Destroyed after the violent climax of the Battle of York in 1813, the fort was rebuilt and now contains Canada’s largest collection of authentic War of 1812 buildings.

Located on the original shoreline of Lake Ontario, Fort York was the city’s primary harbour defence between the 1790s and the 1880s. The Fort continued to house military families and supplies until the early 1930s. In 1934, the City of Toronto opened Fort York as a historic site museum – one of 10 museums now owned and operated by the City.
Fort York’s status as a significant place gained official recognition a decade before it became a museum. In 1923, the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada declared Fort York a national historic site. Today, Fort York National Historic Site spans 17.5 hectares, taking in the 2.8-hectare walled fort and a significant portion of the original Garrison Common, including Victoria Memorial Square, Strachan Avenue Burying Ground, the mouth of the now-lost Garrison Creek and the still-active Fort York Armoury.

The Fort welcomes tens of thousands of visitors every year and helps engage citizens through changing exhibits, tours, programs, lectures and events. The Fort York Visitor Centre was created as a hub connecting visitors to the experience and content of the entire site as well as to the surrounding neighbourhoods and city.

When the new building opened in September 2014, Canadian Architect published this account:

“Designed by Patkau Architects Inc. of Vancouver and Kearns....”

The walled fort, looking west from the Bathurst Street Bridge, 2013
Photo by Andrew Stewart
Mancini Architects Inc. of Toronto, the new Fort York Visitor Centre is a key component in the restoration, redevelopment and revitalization of the entire 43-acre site, intended to impress upon Torontonians and visitors Fort York’s enormous importance as a national historic site, while also enhancing Toronto’s authentic character with architecture that is reflective of the 21st century.

“Until now, Fort York National Historic Site was invisible to passersby. Altered by two centuries of lakefilling, it is now 500 metres from the shoreline of Lake Ontario, below the elevated concrete canopy of the Gardiner Expressway and geographically landlocked by rail corridors. The Visitor Centre establishes a prominent front door to the Fort where none previously existed. As the area is growing with new residential developments, an opportunity was identified to make Fort York a focal point, urban amenity and cultural anchor to the neighbourhood.

“The Visitor Centre will act as an interpretive hub for the entire historic area, including not only the seven acres within the Fort’s walls but also the archaeological landscape, Garrison Common, Victoria Memorial Square, the Fort York Armoury and Garrison Creek parkland being developed to the east. The Visitor Centre will include visitor and information services, galleries for permanent and temporary exhibitions, spaces for meetings and educational programming, a café and administration offices. The Centre will extend beyond its primary purpose to become a new venue for events and community gatherings within the city. The Fort’s administrative offices will be relocated from historic structures inside the ramparts to the Visitor Centre, allowing the historic buildings, among the oldest in the city, to become fully opened to the public.
“To ensure that the Fort’s original, low-slung buildings were not overshadowed by the new building, Patkau and Kearns Mancini embedded the Visitor Centre into the landscape while echoing the natural escarpment that contributed to the Fort’s defenses. Simultaneously bold and discreet, the building is distinctly Canadian in its forthrightness and simplicity. The façade asserts a strong physical presence from Fort York Boulevard, anticipating future use of the space below the Gardiner as a wonderful ‘city room.’ Behind, the building emerges from Garrison Common as an illuminated wedge clad in backlit cast glass channels, allowing the low-slung buildings of the Fort to remain the architectural focus. Environmentally, the earth-sheltered architecture allows for more efficient humidity and climate control and allows control of natural light without compromising the artifacts.

“The Visitor Centre’s striking weathering steel panel façade recalls the site’s defensive landscape—both its lost escarpment and its artillery. At the same time, its materiality speaks to the industrial surroundings. The architectural team looked beyond the Visitor Centre proper to reflect the historic harbour. Their full master plan for the project envisions the weathering steel bluff extended eastward toward the Fort’s wall so that it will appear as a complete geological formation. In front of the Centre, a field of softly moving grasses recalling the flowing waters of Lake Ontario will surround an ‘events dock’ that will accommodate large-scale outdoor events.
“The building directly tells the story of the site; visitors enter across a bridge beneath the Expressway in the present-day city and are invited to undertake a pilgrimage through the site’s history, arriving at the Commons, a site largely unchanged in two centuries. Walking up the gentle switchback slope of the immersive multi-media ‘time-tunnel’ portraying the dramatic events of the War of 1812, visitors journey through the founding of the city, ending on the roof with views of the entire Fort and the Toronto skyline beyond.”

Efforts continue to complete the Visitor Centre and revitalize the full National Historic Site through landscape improvements and new exhibits and programming. To achieve this, the City of Toronto has been collaborating with the Fort York Foundation.

As an independent charity, the Fort York Foundation is leading the private sector fundraising for capital projects at Fort York. The priority project has been the Visitor Centre, which has been supported financially by the Foundation and by the governments of Canada, Ontario and the City of Toronto. The Foundation is also supporting the rehabilitation of Garrison Common, and has established an acquisition fund to enable the City to purchase artifacts to enrich the interpretation of Fort York.

www.toronto.ca/fortyork
www.fortyorkfoundation.ca
From City of Toronto Museums & Heritage Services:
Collaborating with Gertrude Kearns has been an intense, rewarding experience. We are also grateful to the Canadian War Museum, the Department of National Defence, the Toronto Public Library, Library and Archives Canada, David Cyr, Andrew Stewart, Shane O’Neill, Jean-Marc Robin and private collectors for allowing their works to appear in this catalogue.

From Gertrude Kearns:
My deepest appreciation to Major-General (ret’d) Steve Noonan for hiring me in 2005-06, and continuing throughout to see relevance in this self-initiated independent project. I made a ‘contract with myself’ in 2006 that this work would conclude only when the war ’ended’. He would appreciate that better than anyone.

I am deeply indebted to the following, all of whom allowed me time and access in their very busy lives: Lieutenant-General (ret’d) Peter Devlin; Lieutenant-General (ret’d) Andrew Leslie; Lieutenant-General (ret’d) Marc Lessard; Lieutenant-General Jon Vance; Major-General (ret’d) David Fraser; very significantly the first commander who agreed to the project once I was able to resume the core command works in 2011. I most sincerely thank the current and most recent commandants of Canadian Forces College in that order: Brigadier-General Richard Giguère and Brigadier-General (ret’d) Craig Hilton. Very special thanks to Brigadier-General Omer Lavoie; Colonel Ian Hope; Colonel (ret’d) Pat Stogran; Lieutenant-Colonel François Dufault; Lieutenant-Colonel Steve Jourdain; Major Jon Hamilton. As subjects of earlier works 2009-10 very sincere thanks to Colonel Dwayne Hobbs (original portrait in the Canadian War Museum’s collection); Lieutenant-Colonel (ret’d) Andrew Zdunich (original portrait in the City of Toronto’s collection); Major Andrew Beckett, MD; Captain Chuck Pitkin.

I am grateful to Toronto Image Works for their ongoing interest in the project since 2010 and their generous support via a discount on the production and framing side of the war prints for this exhibition. And let me acknowledge digital imaging specialist Jodi Lascar who has unflinchingly put up with my ‘orders’, and offered professional advice over the last several years of production.

I want to acknowledge Dr. Andrew Stewart who supported this exhibition in every aspect via the Fort York Foundation. Without
his initiative, *The Art of Command* might not have been realized.

And now the staff of City of Toronto Museums & Heritage Services have taken on this huge initiative. Their efforts have allowed this series to be shown in a most timely manner. I would especially like to recognize the work of David O’Hara and Robert Kerr at Fort York.

Wayne Reeves, Chief Curator for Toronto’s historic sites, has forged ahead tirelessly with a clear vision for this project. Both the exhibition and this catalogue are the results of his expertise.

As the artist, having the work so generously and comprehensively presented, and so close to the end of the Afghan Mission, I am for this most grateful.